





**Word to Life's** are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

## Week 5: Acts 2:14-28

**DAY 1:** Impulsive and Uneducated... Used by God

**READ:** Acts 2:14-28 (Focus on Joel 2:28-32)

### **EXPLORE:**

As an impulsive and uneducated fisherman, Peter would have been relatively low on the list of possible candidates to explain God's word to a group of thousands. Nonetheless, God delights to use the underqualified for his purposes. This is the first sermon by an apostle, and it would have most likely been delivered in the outer courts of the temple. With speculation filling the air, Peter stepped out in boldness to connect God's revelation in the Hebrew Scriptures with what was occurring before their very eyes.

We would do well to remember that the Day of Pentecost was met with mixed reviews. While some saw the obvious work of God, others assumed the work was the result of alcohol. It was into this sort of setting that God, by His Spirit, enabled Peter to recall and reiterate the truth of the prophet Joel to a people in need. There are a few things we should notice about Joel 2:28-32 that can be really helpful.

1. Joel's prophecy was originally given following a locust plague that had decimated the land. There was widespread famine and the prophecy was communicated as both a sobering word of truth and a hopeful envisioning of God's future plan in what is known as the "Messianic Age."
2. Joel 2:28-32 is one of many calls for repentance inside the Old Testament book. You will notice in Acts 2:21 that Peter also chooses to climax his proclamation of Joel 2 with an emphasis on God's faithfulness as we call upon him in repentance.
3. Peter faithfully mirrors Joel 2:28-32, but he does make some minor changes. This is very significant.

For example, instead of saying, “And afterward” to directly quote Joel, Peter starts with, “In the last days.” There is a lot of theological debate about this change of wording by Peter, but the most likely explanation is that Peter saw the Day of Pentecost following the resurrection and ascension of Christ as the start of the “last days.” Peter saw the gifts of the Spirit and the rapid expansion of the Gospel of Jesus as a sign that the early church was a part of the last days promised many years earlier.

On his own power and intellect alone, Peter would have never been able to explain how prophecy was being fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. When Peter quotes from Joel it is evidence that God can and will use people for His purposes regardless of gender, socio-economic status, age, or education, God works through people. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, scripture was explained, Christ was exalted, and many were challenged to repent and believe.

**APPLY:**

**Big Idea:** Peter was empowered by the Holy Spirit, beyond his qualifications, to boldly apply the truth of God’s Word.

**Question:** The realization that Peter made some minor changes in his quoting of Joel is a complicated thing. Why might this be a challenging subject to tackle? Why do you think Peter changed “and afterward” to “in the last days?”

## Week 5: Acts 2:14-28

**DAY 2:** His Grace is Greater

**READ:** Matthew 27:11-26

### **EXPLORE:**

Twice in Acts 2, Peter references how Jesus was killed by sinful people. In both Acts 2:23 and 2:36 Peter connects the lordship and victory of Christ over death with the broken spiritual condition of the crowd. Could you imagine what it would have felt like to be in the crowd as Peter connected the work of resurrection with your own decision to crucify the Christ? It would be heartbreaking. It would be gut-wrenching.

Our reading for today in Matthew 27:11-26 took us through the story of Jesus's trial before Pilate and the eventual release of Barabbas. At the height of Pilate's interaction with the angry crowd, the enraged group proclaims in Matthew 27:25, "*His [Jesus's] blood be on us and on our children.*" Pilate had given them an opportunity to release Jesus, the only sinless and blameless one to ever live. Instead, they chose to release Barabbas a well-known criminal and insurrectionist. **They chose to release the guilty and punish the innocent.**

Peter reiterates in Acts 2:23, that the innocent Christ was then put to death by means of crucifixion. In the minds of the Jews, Jesus was nothing more than a man who claimed to be God. In the minds of the Romans, Jesus was a leader who threatened political stability. Crucifixion was designed to be public, it engineered to be excruciating, and it was configured to bring maximum shame. Notice that Peter does not skip over the brutality of the cross to talk about the love of Christ. Rather, he points directly at the cross and sees the love of Christ for all, even those in the crowd.

For just a moment, allow yourself to hear Acts 2:23-24 as though you were in the crowd on the Day of Pentecost.

*“This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. **But God** raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.”* Over the crowd on Pentecost, the words would have fallen heavy, heartbreaking, gut-wrenching, and hope-giving all at the same time.

Similar to the listeners in the crowd, we are guilty of much, but have been offered grace still. Praise God!

**APPLY:**

**Big Idea:** God’s grace is greater than our sin.

**Question:** What is the difference between guilt and conviction? Take a moment to write down a few thoughts to share with your LifeGroup.

**Activity:** Spend some time in repentance after reading through Acts 2:23-24. Pray that God would expose sin in your life that you would experience His grace and the renewal found through repentance.

## Week 5: Acts 2:14-28

**DAY 3:** “Deliberate Plan and Foreknowledge”

**READ:** Acts 2:23-24 and Genesis 3:15

### **EXPLORE:**

*Before We Begin:* For the next two days we are going to slow the pace and pay particular attention to two different ideas visible in the passage. Today, we will focus on the terms “**Deliberate plan** and **foreknowledge**.” Tomorrow, we focus on the phrase, “Death could not hold him.” Both days may be a little more complex and detail-oriented but working to study scripture well is worth it.

### Deliberate Plan: **Horizō** (*deliberate*) **boulē** (*plan*)

- Depending on your English translation of Acts 2:23, you may read deliberate plan (NIV), prearranged plan (NLT), definite plan (ESV) or predetermined plan (NASB). Each of these translations are good, but a quick observation of the original reading will prove helpful in our work to understand the preaching of Peter.
- The Greek verb “*horizō*,” is the word that can mean to define, determine, and ordain. From “*horizō*,” the English word “horizon” has been developed. In the same way that a horizon defines the visual break between the earth’s surface and sky, the verb “*horizō*” is meant to communicate the clarity and precision that goes along with the plan of God in Christ. God’s redemption plan in Christ is clear, focused, and defined.

### Foreknowledge: **Prognōsis** (*Foreknowledge*)

- Although the Greek word “*prognosis*” occurs only twice in the New Testament, it is far more common in the today’s language. A prognosis is a prediction or projection of what is going to occur. For example,

a doctor could issue a prognosis for the likely outcome of an illness or infection.

- Do not miss the fact that God had both fully known and fully planned to reconcile a lost humanity to himself by having Jesus killed by crucifixion. In fact, the whole story of scripture tells of this deliberate plan and foreknowledge of God.

Genesis 3:15 is included in today's reading, because this passage is known as the ***protoevangelion***. Protoevangelion literally means "first gospel." It refers to the first time where the Gospel is prophesied in the Bible. According to Genesis 3:15, the seed of Eve would one day crush the head of the enemy. From the Garden of Eden to the Day of Pentecost and beyond, we can celebrate the fact that God not only foreknew, but he also enacted a deliberate plan to redeem people through the death and resurrection of Christ. This is the glory of the Gospel!

**APPLY:**

**Big Idea:** God knew and deliberately planned to reconcile lost people through the sacrifice and victory of Jesus on the cross.

**Question:** Peter chose words on purpose when he shared the truth with the crowd on Pentecost. What stands out to you about the words we studied today?

## Week 5: Acts 2:14-28

**DAY 4:** The Curse Reversed

**READ:** Acts 2:23-24 and Hebrews 2:9-11

**EXPLORE:**

Today, we are going to turn our focus to the phrase, “**Death could not hold him.**” This phrase has appeared in many hymns, poems, and sermons through Christian history. It is profound and it is worth a deeper look.

Even though Jesus was crucified at the hands of sinful men<sup>1</sup>, God was always at work. The tomb that held Jesus’s body was sealed. It was guarded. The story was over...

When it looked like the movement of Jesus had come to a close, it was only the beginning. Jesus was raised from the dead, loosed from the pain<sup>2</sup> of death, because it was impossible for death to keep him. This is a glorious truth, but what does it mean? To understand this, we need to journey back again to the tragedy that occurred in the Garden of Eden.

In Genesis 2:17 God instructed Adam and Eve that if they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would die. The serpent, however, told Eve that God was hiding the real truth. At its core, the serpent tempted them to distrust what God had said (Genesis 3:4-5). They were deceived and they ate (Genesis 3:6-7). The penalty for sin was separation from God, pathological selfishness, and ultimately death. Prior to sin, they would have experienced life — abundant life, complete with the joy of relationship

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 2:23

<sup>2</sup> This word for pain (*ōdin*) is most often related to the pains of childbirth in the New Testament.

with God. Instead of choosing to believe God, they chose to embrace lies. Utterly incapable of earning right relationship

with God, people have continually fallen short of God's design.

Although people are utterly incapable of earning relationship with God, Jesus was faithful throughout his life to never sin. Experiencing all of the hardship and all of the temptation that people encounter in life, Jesus persevered without distrusting God. Even though he was sinless, Jesus was willing to experience the pain and penalty of death so that sinful people could encounter the grace of God which culminates in eternal life. Speaking of Jesus' victory over death and grave, John Piper writes, "It's not hard to figure out: He can break out because he wasn't forced in."<sup>3</sup> For those who have believed in Christ and his sacrifice, death's curse has been reversed!

**APPLY:**

**Big Idea:** Jesus was completely sinless and willingly experienced death to reverse its curse.

**Question:** To reverse a curse, in its fullest sense, is to transform it into a blessing. Is it possible for believer's in Christ to look at death as a blessing? Why or Why not?

**Question:** What are some questions or thoughts that you have as you read today's study and the Bible verses that you could bring to your LifeGroup? Make a few notes to share with your LifeGroup.

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<sup>3</sup> Taken from the Desiring God Resources Page in an article entitled "Can't Keep Jesus Down!"

## Week 5: Acts 2:14-28

**DAY 5:** Redeemer and Promise Keeper

**READ:** Psalm 16

**EXPLORE:**

Psalm 16 mirrors the Christian life in so many ways. In one small Psalm we see David earnestly asking for help and expressing deeply profound confidence all in the same breath. Psalm 16 is a picture of what it looks like to move from instability to security based on the assurance of God's goodness.

When Peter quotes Psalm 16, it is both a plea for safety and a joyous proclamation of God's goodness. In Acts 2, Peter uses Psalm 16:8-11 and applies it directly to the work of Jesus. Peter is spending every word in his speech at Pentecost to get the crowd to see what God has done in Christ. Although this Psalm is written by David in the midst of his own difficult situation, Peter applies the passage directly to the life of Christ. "Holy One" could refer to David as the anointed King over Israel, but for Peter it was even more appropriate as a designation for Christ. In expectancy, ancient Israel was waiting for a liberator and king who would be born from David's family line. Israel had been promised a rescuer from David's family. They were promised a king.

In this Psalm, David cries out for help and receives deep confidence. This conversion of uncertainty to assurance occurs because there is an underlying confidence in the God who does not abandon His people in death. God is in the business of making the path of life known, even when life is uncertain and challenging. Peter is proclaiming the very same thing. In Christ, we are not abandoned to death, but can experience joy through the "paths of life" which have been revealed in Jesus.

Please do not miss the fact that, Peter does not hesitate to connect the truth of the Old Testament the revelation given in the New Testament. When Peter quotes Psalm 16, it is not an accident. He does not randomly break into song lyrics. Everything is purposeful. It is subtle, but notice the fact that Peter was able to recite the Psalm by memory. For the crowd that had gathered, he was attaching the reputation and authority of King David with Jesus. This was, is, and always will be a big deal!

This Psalm would most likely have been rehearsed throughout Israelite history and reapplied within the life of Christ. We should join them by continuing to remember, with joy, the promises of God that were fulfilled in Christ. Let's begin that habit today.

**APPLY:**

**Big Idea:** In saving people from the death and decay, God is not only a redeemer, but a promise keeper.

**Activity:** Read through Acts 2:26-28. Take time to read through these three verses a few times, write them down, and commit them to memory. Pray that God would help you remember and apply His Word. It may be a challenge, but it is worth it.

## Week 6: Acts 2:29-41

**DAY 1:** Why the Right Hand of God Matters

**READ:** Luke 22:67-71 and Acts 2:29-41

### **EXPLORE:**

If you ever want to hear an embarrassing story from a preacher, ask them about their first time communicating from God's word. You are sure to hear a story containing some combination of awkwardness, terror, and excitement. First sermons can be interesting to say the least. As we study the second half of Peter's sermon in week six of our study of Acts, we should remember that this is his first time. This is a side note, but it is important nonetheless.

On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit led Christ followers to proclaim that Jesus is Lord and salvation comes through His name. As a result, the message demanded a response from those who heard. This week, we will look at the second part of Peter's first sermon and we will unpack some of the central ideas.

The story of Christ that is often told includes His birth, life, death, and resurrection without any thought of his glorious ascent to the right hand of the Father. It is one of the most important, but often overlooked aspects of the story of Jesus. Jesus's position of power and proximity to God after his resurrection are really important.

In the ancient world, the individual of highest rank would be positioned at the King's right hand. Peter, in Acts 2, is making a powerful claim about the relationship between Jesus and God the Father. In Luke 22, when Jesus was being tried for His "*crimes*," he promised that he would "*be seated next to the right hand of the power of God.*" This claim was enough to outrage the Sanhedrin and encourage the believer all at the same time. Not only has Jesus

conquered death and offered freedom, but he is positioned in power forever.

When Peter proclaims that Jesus has been “exalted to the right hand of God” it is not just a figure of speech, but an assurance of power. Peter was connecting the language of victory from the Old Testament and the promises of Jesus himself to what had occurred in Christ. As we read Acts 2, we are meant to join the ancient audience in marveling at the unique power and victory of Jesus at the right hand of God the father.

**APPLY:**

**Big Idea:** As one who is exalted to the right hand of God, Jesus has unique power and authority.

**Activity:** Read the passages below and write down what you notice about the “right hand of God” mentioned within each text. Take notes and bring observations to your LifeGroup!

- Genesis 48:13-14
- Psalm 110:1
- Ephesians 1:20-21
- Romans 8:34
- Hebrews 10:12-13

## Week 6: Acts 2:29-41

**DAY 2:** Extraordinary Explanation

**READ:** Ephesians 5:17-20

**EXPLORE:**

Have you ever noticed that it is possible to see something take place and fail to perceive what is really going on? Sometimes we are able to see and fail to truly observe. At other moments, we are able to observe but fail to perceive correctly. This can be true in life and it can be true in faith as well. The gap between perception and reality is visible in the backdrop of Acts 2.

Remember that there was a mixed reaction in the crowd to speaking in tongues which occurred in Pentecost. The crowd was able to see the incredible things that were happening, but some were unable to perceive the realities occurring below the surface. In the second part of Peter's speech in Acts 2:29-41, he is explaining how the victory of Christ has secured the blessing of the Holy Spirit for believers. Notice, Peter is embracing the miracle and mystery of God's gift and working to explain what is taking place at the very same time.

On the Day of Pentecost, the gift of the Holy Spirit was a promised and prophesied assurance of Christ's victory. Not only is Jesus positioned in victory forever, but he is willing and able to provide the Holy Spirit to those who believe.

*In Acts 2:32-33, Peter says, "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear."*

Do not miss the fact that Peter did not diminish the extraordinary by explaining it.

With the assurance of one who had encountered the risen Christ and experienced the blessing of the Holy Spirit, Peter explained the extraordinary with confidence and power. He was filled with the Holy Spirit and the results were incredible.

As believers, we are also called by the Holy Spirit to the same confidence and power. Into a world of confusion, the Holy Spirit is given to bring clarity. Through the grace of God evidenced on the cross of Christ, we too are able to be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Today's activity is going to take a deeper look at how we can be filled with the Holy Spirit in the community of faith.

**APPLY:**

**Big Idea:** Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter was able to explain the extraordinary.

**Activity:** Ephesians 5:17-20 provides a picture of what it looks like to be filled with the Holy Spirit in the community of faith.

- According to this passage, what is it like for a person to be filled with the Holy Spirit?
- After looking at Ephesians 5:17-20, talk with your LifeGroup about how these truths could be applied in the church.

## Week 6: Acts 2:29-41

**Day 3:** The Importance of Repentance

**READ:** Acts 2:37

**EXPLORE:**

German pastor and theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote, “Lack of repentance is the root cause of powerlessness in the church, in this materialistic, self-indulgent age. There can be no spiritual power in a non-repentant church.”

Repentance is the true and appropriate response from a broken and messy humanity in light of the goodness of God in Christ. We see this throughout the book of Acts.

For a moment, imagine what it would have felt like to be a part of the crowd listening to Peter at Pentecost. Feeling the guilt of rejecting and crucifying the promised Messiah, you are, at the very same time, realizing that salvation is offered through Christ. Acts 2 provides us with a clear and compelling picture of what it looks like to repent and believe the Gospel.

In response to Peter’s sermon, we are told that the crowd was filled with a deep conviction of their sin in light of the Gospel. Acts 2:37 describes the sense of conviction by telling us that the crowd was “cut to the heart.” This language is not accidental!

The word “cut” used to describe the crowd reaction is *katanyssomai*. This is the only time in the New Testament where this word occurs. This word can mean to prick or pierce often with the connotations of extreme sorrow. For the original reader, *katanyssomai* would have communicated the idea of being intensely troubled. Notice

that the crowd was intensely troubled and willing to act. They were cut to the heart and ready to respond.

Feeling sense of conviction about sin is always supposed to be paired with a desire to act. This passage of scripture presents a beautiful picture of what it looks like to not only feel the weight of our sin, but also be willing to respond to the gospel. Even though it can feel, quite literally, heartbreaking, conviction is a God-given blessing. Being cut to the heart by the Gospel can be heartbreaking and hope-giving all at the same time.

It has been said that both butchers and surgeons are professionals at cutting. The difference is that one cuts to kill and the other to heal. Acts 2 should serve as a reminder that God is in the business of cutting to the heart like a surgeon. Like a doctor who desires to remove cancer, being cut to the heart in light of the Gospel, is a gift from God.

**APPLY:**

**Big Idea:** Feeling conviction and genuinely repenting enable you to know and embrace more of God's power.

**Question:** When have you experienced a strong sense of conviction about sin? How do you feel you responded to this sense of conviction?

**Question:** In your opinion, do you think it is hard to understand conviction as a God-given blessing? Why or why not?

## Week 6: Acts 2:29-41

**DAY 4:** Is baptism necessary to be saved?

**READ:** Acts 2:38

**EXPLORE:**

*“Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ **for** the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”—Acts 2:38*

Few verses have sparked as much difficulty in church history as Acts 2:38. It has challenged believers throughout the centuries and raised several interesting questions. Perhaps the most long-lasting and hotly debated question is: “Is baptism necessary to be saved?”

The scriptures make it clear that people are made right and justified with God by union with Christ and the miracle of new birth by grace through faith (Romans 3:28, 4:5, 5:1, John 3:16, Acts 13:38-39). Right relationship is secured by faith in the grace of God which has been made available through Christ alone. **We are justified with God not in light of what we are able to do but based upon what has been done in Christ.** This truth is visible in Jesus’s interaction with the thief who believed while being nailed on the cross next to Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

The thief on the cross was not baptized and yet he was promised paradise by the crucified Lord. Now, we ought not build a whole theology of baptism from this one moment, but we should rule out baptism as an absolute necessity for salvation. Simply, it was not in the case of Luke 23:43. If salvation is given based on faith, then Acts 2:38 cannot mean that we need to be baptized in order to be justified with God. The question still lingers, why do we have

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 23:32-43

passages that seem to make it look like baptism is necessary for sins to be forgiven?

The word that is translated as “for” in the English versions of Acts 2:38 can also be translated “on the basis of.” Instead of thinking that Peter is telling the crowd that they have to be baptized in order to be forgiven, he is telling them that baptism is a proclamation that forgiveness has already been received. Their baptisms are to occur on the basis of their faith in the Gospel of Jesus.

Even though baptism is not necessary to be saved, it is crucial in our willingness to follow Jesus. Although it does not earn us salvation, baptism remains a command from Jesus and a fundamental aspect of the great commission in Matthew 28:18-20. First, baptism is given as a sign of the new covenant. Second, baptism is an outward, public proclamation of an inward spiritual reality.

**APPLY:**

**Big Idea:** Baptism is an important act of obedience, but we are saved only by grace through faith.

**Activity:** Take some time thinking of other Bible verses that talk about baptism. What do you learn about baptism as you observe other scriptures?

**Discussion Continued:** For more information read “What is baptism and how important is it?” by John Piper on [desiringgod.org](http://desiringgod.org).

## **Week 6: Acts 2:29-41**

**DAY 5:** Gospel Outbreak

**READ:** Acts 2:40-41

### **EXPLORE:**

It is hard to imagine what it would be like to experience the revival that is recorded in Acts 2. Think about the fact that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, a group of only 120 believers had increased by 3000 in a single day. This is approximately 2500% increase in a single day. Remember that Pentecost was a day that started with mixed reactions of confusion and conviction alike. Acts 2 records the first of many Gospel outbreaks that have occurred in Christian history. There are a few things that are worth noting about the Acts 2 Gospel Outbreak.

### **(1) Not every great sermon is met with unbelievable growth.**

There is a tendency to measure the success of gospel proclamation on the response of those who are listening. We should be reminded that even the preaching of Jesus was not met with universal acceptance. Jesus is the greatest communicator to ever walk the planet, but even his sermons were often rejected. We are called to faithfulness and to trust God with the fruitfulness.

### **(2) 3000 new believers in a single day would have been challenging and exciting.**

Think about 3000 babies being born in a day. It would be both incredibly joyous and challenging. Pentecost conversions brings a whole new meaning to children's ministry. The work of the Holy Spirit resulted in 3000 new Christ-followers who were, in many ways, untrained and untaught. In repentance, reception of the Holy Spirit, and baptism, 3000 new people were identified as believers in one day.

**(3) Healthy movements are not the only ones that grow.**

We often inappropriately believe that if we are doing the right thing, it will grow. Additionally, we often believe that if a movement is growing it is a sign of goodness. Growth is often misidentified as the primary indicator of a good movement. The mark of God-honoring Gospel outbreak is not necessarily growth, but a holy dependence upon the Holy Spirit to make much of Christ.

**(4) The Holy Spirit is the primary change agent in Gospel response.**

Prior to his ascension, Jesus taught that it was greater that He leave so that the Holy Spirit would come. Pentecost is a realization and a reminder of the Holy Spirit's power for a world in need. As Christ-followers we should daily remind ourselves that the Holy Spirit through the word of God is the primary change agent in Gospel response.

**APPLY:**

**Big Idea:** Pentecost would have been an incredibly exciting and challenging day in Christian history.

**Question:** What are be some challenges associated with rapid growth in the church? What would be some ways that you could try to maintain healthy growth? Write down some observations to share with your LifeGroup.

## **Week 7: Acts 2:42-47**

**DAY 1:** Developing Holy Habits

**READ:** Acts 2:42-47

**EXPLORE:**

The dream for the Word to Life Studies was created from texts like Acts 2:42-47.

It is a beautiful picture of what the church that is empowered by the Holy Spirit is intended to be. Through this passage and others like it, we are given a window through which we can see the true vibrancy of Christian life that is lived together. Realize that this is the first of many summary statements in the book of Acts that tells us what community was like for believers in the wake of Pentecost. It is the first community of Holy-Spirit filled believers.

During this week's studies we are going to take a look at several different aspects of these verses. Today, however, we are going to focus on perhaps one of the most essential characteristics of the early church: DEVOTION.

**(1) Devotion communicates the ideas of single-minded focus and steadfastness.**

Even though the community of believers in the days following Pentecost came from different walks of life, it was possible for them to share a single-minded focus and steadfastness through the unity of the Holy Spirit. As we read this passage, we are supposed to consider our own singularity of focus or lack thereof.

**(2) Devotion communicates the idea of giving constant attention to something.**

The early church developed a pattern of consistently giving attention to the scriptures, to fellowship, to prayer, to the Lord's Supper, and to caring for each other's needs. When

the Holy Spirit is at work in the community of believers, it will result in a habitual dedication not only to God's word, but also to God's people.

**(3) Devotion communicates the refusal of the early community to be divided in allegiance.**

We seem to love the idea of devotion until we realize how much it will cost us to exercise unique dedication. The call of the church is to be uniquely devoted together to continue the work of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

When the Luke summarizes that the early church "devoted themselves" he is communicating on purpose. We are meant to see what is possible in the church when we are focused on the word of God, empowered by the Spirit of God, alongside the people of God.

**APPLY:**

**Big Idea:** God has designed the church to be devoted together.

**Question:** In what ways do you demonstrate God-honoring devotion in your life? In what ways do you feel like God is trying to challenge your devotion to his word or his people? Take down some notes to share with your LifeGroup.

## Week 7: Acts 2:42-47

**DAY 2:** What is Christian Fellowship?

**READ:** Acts 2:42-47 and Philippians 2:1-4

### **EXPLORE:**

The commitment to Christian community was no easy decision for early believers. In order to embrace the calling of Christ, believers in the first-century Greco-Roman world would have to give up a great deal. Sometimes when we read the Bible, we do not realize the level of sacrifice that accompanied a person's commitment to the Christian church. An individual who heard and responded to the Gospel would have most likely put relationships with family and their own financial livelihood at risk. They would often risk their outward reputation and position in a society. **To forsake all else, necessitates clinging to something new.**

Into the intensity of this sort of sacrifice, enters the biblical heartbeat for Christian community that is often translated as "fellowship." In Acts 2:42, we read that not only were the Spirit-filled believers devoted to teaching, but also to fellowship. Throughout scripture, this community is depicted in many different ways. It is described as a church, a household, a body, and a structure just to name a few.

Fellowship is the English word translated from the Greek term, "*koinonia*." *Koinonia* communicates several different things, but the fundamental idea is that of a shared identity and mission. The *koinonia* refers to a shared identity. As believers, we share the same heavenly father, the same spirit, and the same value as children of God. The church is designed to be a people who share a mission as well. Alongside others in the community of faith, we are called to share struggles and celebrate victories.

Remember that Acts 2:42-47 is given to us in the glorious aftermath of Pentecost. Just as God was powerful in Pentecost, He was powerful in the formation of Christian

community. It would be very challenging to maintain good health in a movement that grew from 120 people to 3000 in a day. As such, *koinonia* (fellowship) is the glue that is powerful enough to hold together the explosive growth in the early church.

Acts 2:44 tells us that Christian fellowship led the early believers to give freely and meet the needs of people around them. The scriptures tell us that they “had things in common.” The way that this idea is formed in Greek tells us that this was not a one-time event, but an ongoing pattern of the way the early church responded to the needs of others. Christian fellowship is a reminder of how deeply the love of God has been displayed on earth. True *koinonia* is a proclamation of our shared identity and mission that is founded in Christ.

**APPLY:**

**Big Idea:** Christian fellowship is a shared identity and mission founded on God’s love.

**Question:** What comes to mind when you think of fellowship? How closely do you think that gut reaction reflects the early church devotion to *koinonia* in Acts 2:42-47?

**Question:** The phrase “had everything in common” can be challenging to understand. What do you think this phrase actually means?

## Week 7: Acts 2:42-47

**DAY 3:** Prayer and Protein

**READ:** Acts 2:42-47 and I Corinthians 11:23-26

### EXPLORE:

The first two studies this week focused on how the church was devoted to teaching and fellowship (*koinonia*). These two areas of devotion are crucial. They deserve our focus and attention. However, I wonder how often we focus on teaching and fellowship only to forget the other areas of emphasis in Acts 2:42-47.

Scripture tells us that the early church was devoted to **breaking bread** and **praying together**. It may be overlooked, but it is so important that we slow down enough to take a deeper look.

To share a meal with someone in the ancient world communicated a lot. Think about when Jesus decided to eat with tax collectors and sinners in the Gospel accounts. This decision to associate around a table confused and angered a great deal of people that watched His life. The church's devotion to break bread together meant that they were not only sharing a meal but sharing a much deeper bond. To share a meal with someone in the first-century was to attach your reputation to another. It was not just honor that was shared around a table, but life in general.

When we read passages like this, we should be challenged to think through how we are living life together in community. It is not enough to be devoted to teaching and fellowship. We need to also be dedicated to prayer and the sharing of meals with others. This is the model laid out in Acts 2:42-47.

The church, throughout history, has been dedicated to spending time with one another around a meal. The devotion to breaking bread references meals in general, but

it most likely alludes to the early practices of the Lord's Supper or what is often known as Communion. It is important to notice that the early church did not waste much time before they started remembering the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Only a few days prior, Jesus had been with them in person, but they did not hesitate to practice remembering Jesus through the Lord's Supper. This commitment to practicing the Lord's Supper was foundational to establishing stability and the centrality of the Gospel in the early Christian communities. As we read passages like this, we ought to ask, "How are we establishing patterns of remembering what has been accomplished through Christ?"

**APPLY:**

**Big Idea:** Alongside teaching and shared identity, the church should be focused on prayer and the breaking of bread.

**Question:** Do you feel like the church has done a good job of being committed to "breaking bread" and "prayer?" Why or why not?

**Question:** Do you have established patterns of remembering what has been accomplished through Christ? If so, what are they? If no, what gets in the way of establishing these patterns? Write your responses that can be shared within your LifeGroup.

## Week 7: Acts 2:42-47

**DAY 4:** Developed to be Deployed

**READ:** Acts 2:42-47 and Malachi 3:16

### **EXPLORE:**

Even though Acts 2 marks a decisive and new movement of the Lord in human history, God has a long track record of developing and flourishing believers in community. We should rightly view Acts 2 as a fresh move of God through the Holy Spirit, but we would do well to notice how God has been **developing** and **deploying** His People throughout the large story of scripture.

From the creation of the world, God designed humanity to live in harmony and peace with one another. As a result of our pride and sinfulness, our ability to live in peaceful, God-honoring community was marred and broken. It is only through the grace and mercy of Christ that God's good design for loving community can be restored.

Malachi 3:16 is one of many beautiful descriptions of faithful community that is included in the larger biblical story. It says, *"Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name."*

In simple acts of obedience in community, the Lord was listening. In the purposeful gathering of community, a scroll of remembrance was written. We should not underestimate the significance and supernatural power of gathering together and learning from one another. The reality is that God designed Christian community not only to develop you into the image of Christ, but to deploy on mission to the world.

In Acts 2:42-47 the community of believers after Pentecost are focused on caring for each other, maintaining solid

doctrine, and constantly seeking the Lord in prayer. This devotion is fertile soil for the miraculous and incredible work of God. Let us be dedicated to the same passion that is blessed in Malachi 3:16 and evidenced Acts 2.

We were never designed to grow in faith while remaining isolated from others. Following Jesus is deeply personal, but it was never intended to be private. We ought to follow the example in the early church by seriously considering how God might want to develop our community and deploy us for his glory!

**APPLY:**

**Activity:** Take time to read through and meditate upon all of Malachi 3. As you reflect on it, in what ways could this passage affect our view on ministry together as a community?

**Question:** Think about what it would look like for you to be developed in faith and deployed on mission. Write down some ideas and bring them to your LifeGroup.

## Week 7: Acts 2:42-47

**Day 5:** Hospitality: Food Fight the Devil

**READ:** Acts 2:42-47 and 2 Samuel 9

### **EXPLORE:**

The value of hospitality is incredibly underrated. The significance of a welcoming home and a caring meal is often undervalued. If we allow Acts 2:42-47 and 2 Samuel 9 to influence our hearts and impact our lives, we will see the undeniable significance of Christian hospitality.

On Day 3 of this week, we briefly discussed the early church's commitment to the breaking of bread, but it would be beneficial for us to consider the significance of Christian hospitality at greater lengths today.

*If you have not already, take time to read through the story provided in 2 Samuel 9.*

In 2 Samuel 9, David displays incredible kindness to a descendant of his long-standing rival, Saul. As a descendant of Saul, Mephibosheth could and most likely should have been killed by David. Instead of violence, **David shows us the power of hospitality to bring about restoration and hope in the lives of those who are often overlooked.**

Christian hospitality is the outpouring of kindness that has been lavishly displayed in the life and ministry of Christ.

When we think about Pentecost as an ancient festival, there is a certain amount of cultural hospitality that we should be expecting. As a heavily attended festival, it would have been customary for Jewish families to host other Jews. Hospitality was customary. It was expected. Where hospitality was expected, the early church exceeded expectations.

What we will encounter, through several examples in the book of Acts, is a steadfast commitment from the early church to radical displays of hospitality to those in need.

The heartbeat of hospitality that is visible in the life of David and the Acts 2 Church, is the power of God to bring people into the loving community of faith. Hospitality is a calling for all who claim to follow Jesus. Although some individuals are uniquely gifted at creating hospitable spaces or creating delicious meals, God's design for hospitality is given to all those who claim to follow Jesus!

Don't underestimate the value of a warm meal. Don't undervalue the significance of a shared meal. Maybe you ought to consider how you might be used by God to provide food for those in need. Perhaps there is a neighbor who you ought to invite in for a meal.

**APPLY:**

**Big Idea:** Don't underestimate the value and power of genuine hospitality

**Question:** What stands out to you about the example for hospitality displayed by David in 2 Samuel 9?

**Question:** Why do you think the gift of hospitality is so often overlooked or undervalued? Write down the name of someone who you could display hospitality toward and ask your LifeGroup to keep you accountable to that end.

## **Week 8: Acts 3:1-10**

**Day 1:** Ninth Hour Prayer

**READ:** Acts 3:1-10

### **EXPLORE:**

One of the most beautiful aspects of scripture is how saturated it is with significance. Acts 3:1-10 is nothing short of a beautiful moment in the life of the early apostles, Peter and John. It is a story, packed with significance and power, that invites us to study it closely. Often, studying scripture well means a careful attention to what is written. At other times, however, there is a great deal that can be learned through what is left unmentioned in the biblical text.

When Luke sets up the miraculous account of Peter and John, he mentions that the pair went in the ninth hour which was the hour of prayer. In both what is said, and what is left unsaid, the introduction to the story tells us a great deal. We need to be careful not to let the little, but significant details of the introduction pass us by.

According to ancient Jewish customs, the order of worship would include a time for sacrifice followed by a time for communal and individual prayer. In these two actions, a Jewish person would declare their sinfulness before God and offer a sacrifice in order to make the divine-human relationship united once more. Acts 3:1 mentions a time for prayer without included the customary practice of sacrifice. This is certainly not an accident.

Peter and John did not attend the ritual time of sacrifice, because the ultimate and supreme sacrifice had already been made in Christ. Through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, there was no more need for the traditional Jewish practice of sin sacrifices. Acts 3:1 mentions Peter and John visited the temple for prayer in

the ninth hour specifically. If you remember from our study of the Gospel of John, the ninth hour was the time in which Jesus cried from the cross, "It is finished." Their intentional decision to visit and minister from the temple without participating in sacrifices connects God's work in the Old Testament with his revelation in the New Testament.

Jesus is a continuation of God's unfolding revelation from the Old Testament but Acts 3:1 is a powerful reminder that something new and powerful has occurred in Christ. Peter and John did not need to offer animal sacrifice, because the supreme sacrifice had already been made upon their behalf. We should not miss the fact that this subtle, but significant introduction sets the groundwork for the entirety of the miracle that will follow!

**APPLY:**

**Big Idea:** Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice to pay for our sins.

**Question:** Acts 3:1 includes information and also selectively excludes others. Summarize the significant in the subtle information provided in Acts 3:1.

**Question:** How do the things we learned about the introduction in Acts 3 help to set the stage for the miracle that comes next?

## **Week 8: Acts 3:1-10**

**Day 2:** Location, Location, Location...

**READ:** Acts 3:1-10

### **EXPLORE:**

Location, Location, Location... for anyone who has bought or sold a piece of property, this repetitive phrase may be all too familiar. In Scripture, when a location of a setting or an individual is mentioned it is significant. Yesterday we looked at how Peter and John approached the temple at the time of prayer, but today we are going to look at how “The gate called beautiful” helps us to understand the significance and weight of the story.

Acts 3:1-10 gives us a clear idea of the setting for this story, but that is not always the case in biblical stories. For example, the Old Testament story of Job gives us almost no indication of date or setting. The Bible doesn’t always let us know the setting for where something takes place, but when it does, we ought to take a closer look.

Scholars believe that the “gate called beautiful” would have been a lavish entry way that could have towered up to 75 feet from the earth below. It would have been a symbol of prominence, power, and obviously enough... beauty. Imagine how powerful the contrast is between a huge, imposing gate near the temple and the meager, often overlooked crippled who positioned nearby. Those who belong to God have always been challenged to take care of the needy and yet, just feet from the temple, the pain of the crippled man was overlooked. God’s temple was meant to bless others and display the heart of God, but in Acts 3:2 “beauty” is contrasted with undeniable pain. The gate may have been beautiful, but there were still people who were neglected outside.

The position of the cripple did not keep him from experiencing the power of God. Peter and John, following

the example of Jesus and being empowered by the Holy Spirit, were able to flip the script on where God encounters humanity. Through the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, God's power and presence moves from the temple that was a building to the temple that is the body of believers. Acts 3:1-10 is one of many stories in which the miraculous healing of God is funneled through believers by the power of the Holy Spirit. The location of this story should challenge us to consider who is in close proximity to the "temple" but has not been reached by the power in the temple.

**APPLY:**

**Big Idea:** The people in close proximity to the church should certainly be cared for by the church.

**Activity:** Take time to consider who is in close proximity to the church who could be cared for by the church. Make a list of ideas to be shared with your LifeGroup.

**Question:** The beauty of the gate is contrasted with the difficulty of the man's disability. What comes to mind when you think about this contrast? Take a moment to read and pray through what the Lord might be asking you to do in response to this story.

## **Week 8: Acts 3:1-10**

**DAY 3:** Hope for the Sufferers

**READ:** Acts 3:1-2 and John 9:1-41

### **EXPLORE:**

“Who sinned, this man or his parents?” This is the question from John 9:2 that jump starts Jesus’s healing of the man that is born blind. In the ancient world and in many contemporary cultures alike, disability has been associated with divine punishment for sin.

The question asked by the disciples in John 9:2 would have been a popular line of thinking for the vast majority in the ancient world. As we continue to think on and study the crippled man in Acts 3, we need to briefly unpack the stigma that would have surrounded his condition.

In the background of the biblical texts, it was common to associate a birth defect with a sign of God’s judgement upon the sinfulness of the individual and his or her parents. The question then was consistently asked, “What did you do to deserve this judgement from God?” Sympathy for the disabled was not commonplace and help occurred in rare occasions. However, as we read Acts 3 and John 9, we are supposed to see how Jesus and eventually His followers challenged this way of thinking.

In Acts 3, Peter and John follow the example of Jesus in John 9 by radically reversing the condition of the disenfranchised man so that Christ would be made known. In Acts 3, Peter and John go out of their way to demonstrate not only miraculous healing, but astonishing love.

For the crippled man, the disciples speak to him, look at him, touch him, help him, and go alongside him as he is included into community life. These disciples, mirroring the

work of their savior, are not afraid to associate with the lowly and alone.

Sometimes, it can be incredibly challenging to believe that God can bring about good from situations of struggle or suffering. For some, the resolution and understanding of hardships will only make sense in eternity. In light of this, our calling here and now is to trust God. Just as God brought about good from suffering in and through the life of Christ, God is still in the business of transforming hardship for His glory.

**APPLY:**

**Big Idea:** God is able to transform suffering for His glory.

**Question:** Jesus is the ultimate example of unjustified suffering. In what ways would Jesus have experienced suffering?

**Question:** How might it be helpful for the person going through hardship to think of Jesus as a suffering servant?

**Question:** Have you ever experienced suffering or hardship that was transformed for God's glory? *(This may or may not be something that you choose to share with your LifeGroup.)*

## **Week 8: Acts 3:1-10**

**DAY 4:** Shock and Awe

**READ:** Acts 2:43 and Acts 3:10

### **EXPLORE:**

Wonder and amazement occur throughout the whole Bible. From Old Testament stories of the inexplicable to the miraculous accounts of the New Testament, astonishing moments are everywhere.

The miraculous healing of the man who was born crippled results in a response of amazement from onlookers. This phrase should be very familiar. At the close of Pentecost, the vibrancy of the Christian community results in a widespread response of wonder and amazement.

It is the same phrasing used in both 2:43 and Acts 3:10. Now, we need to explore why that is significant.

We are meant to see the same wonderous and awe-inspiring God that is active in Pentecost is alive and well in the miraculous healings of John and Peter. The beauty of Christian community (2:43) and the miraculous healing of the man (3:10) are both designed to be wonderous, awe-inspiring, and Christ-exalting. In a way, Luke is trying to get us to see the continuation of the way that God was revealed in the giving of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost with the acts of the early church.

Simple, the same Holy Spirit that dwelt perfectly in the words and deeds of Christ is now being made visible in the words, deeds, and ministry of His apostles. The result for both is wonder and amazement.

When God calls people to himself through Jesus and transforms sinful humanity into a community that is

dependent upon the Holy Spirit and anchored in the word of God, it is wonderful! It is amazing.

God is glorified when we choose to serve sacrificially, give generously, and love our communities well. We have the opportunity to continue playing a role in what He began. Acts 2:43 and 3:10 should remind us that God is glorified in the miraculous, the mysterious, and even the mundane.

It is not only the miraculous events that amaze and mystify onlookers, but also knitting together of diverse people who are unified in the desire to live like Jesus and exemplify the Gospel in everyday life. If we commit ourselves to daily communal dependence upon God, wonder, amazement, and Christ-exalting growth will follow!

**APPLY:**

**Big Idea:** The same wonder and amazement of Pentecost is still present in the church.

**Question:** Why do you think it is significant that the same phrasing is used in two different passages in Acts? How might this influence our own view of ministry today?

## **Week 8: Acts 3:1-10**

**DAY 5:** The Miraculous in Everyday Life

**READ:** None

**EXPLORE:**

Taking a look at Acts 3:1-10 is incredible, but for many people, it sparks a very different reaction. Instead of Acts 3:1-10 giving hope and inspiration, some are unfortunately left discouraged and seemingly alone. Hearing stories of miraculous healing can often make us ask, “Does God still work in miraculous ways?”

Many hurting people have wrestled with long lasting pain, addiction, disability and are left to ask the question, “If the Bible is filled with miraculous healing, why does it feel like I have never experienced it?”

Here are a few thoughts for those who may struggle with the miraculous.

1. God still continues to work in miraculous and supernatural ways. In our communities, there are numerous stories to be shared of people who have encountered the supernatural provision and healing of God in their lives.
2. The global church is filled with a widespread and often more robust theology of the miraculous. It can be difficult for churches in contemporary western cultures to free themselves from the viewpoint that the natural world is all that exists. Global Christianity, which is much more willing to embrace and acknowledge things outside of the physical, is often in a better position to experience the miraculous work of God.

3. The awareness or lack thereof is not always a good indicator of whether or not something exists. It

would be poor logic to assume that because some individuals don't experience the miraculous, it does not exist.

As we think through these thoughts and others, remember that the crippled man might have very well possessed the same doubts. When the crippled man saw Peter and John he asked for money with no thought of the miraculous in mind. Day after day he sat by the gate called beautiful and all he could dream of was some money. It is quite probable that he had consistently questioned the goodness, hope, and justice of God given his difficult position.

The miracle in this passage served to authenticate God's message and His messengers. They serve to advance the Gospel and remind the individual of God's good design.

**Big Idea:** Miracles are used by God to authenticate His message and His messengers.

**Question:** How would you define the term, "miraculous?"

**Activity:** Take time to consider the following quote from Tim Keller's book entitled, "The Reason for God."

*"Miracles lead not simply to cognitive belief, but to worship, to awe and wonder. Jesus' miracles in particular were never magic tricks, designed only to impress and coerce. . . . Instead, he used miraculous power to heal the sick, feed the hungry, and raise the dead. Why? We modern people think of miracles as the suspension of the natural order, but Jesus meant them to be the restoration of the natural order."*

