



HIGHROCK 2022  
DISCUSSION GUIDE

# SERIES OVERVIEW

Of all the themes in the Book of Acts, one of the most consistent is the work and movement of the Holy Spirit through and among the people of God. We are introduced to a Holy Spirit who is divine, alive, mysterious, and powerful all at once. This very same Holy Spirit we encounter in the Book of Acts is at work through and among us today.

This study aims to dive into the Book of Acts with the full expectation that the Holy Spirit will meet us in our reading. Over the six weeks of this study we will be asking how do we read the text to encounter and discern the Spirit's movement in the early church and in us as readers?

"How to read the Scriptures?" is not a new question. Nor is its answer inherently obvious. Rather, as people seeking to be informed and formed by the Word of God in the Scriptures, reading the Bible must always be viewed as a practice we engage in together. A Covenant resource paper, linked in the Appendix, offers this perspective for reading the Scriptures: "At our best we... read the Bible faithfully, communally, rigorously, charitably, and holistically, with commitments to grace, transformation, and mission." We'll try our best to keep that in mind through this work.

Everyone will come to this text with varying experiences and knowledge. Engaging with Scripture is not about uniformity of opinion, or deciding the right approach or interpretation. Scripture will always hold a space of mystery. This study will engage the texts in various ways to highlight a few ways to examine Scripture and allow Scripture to examine us. Each week you will reflect on how the passage and method inform how you connect to God personally, connect to God's people, and connect to God's purposes.

The overarching goal of this study is to practice exactly that. May God meet us in our engagement.

## Text & Topic

Week 1: Acts 1:1-11 - Listen attentively to the text

Week 2: Acts 2 - Lectio Divina

Week 3: Acts 4:31-5:11 - Read in different translations

Week 4: Acts 6:1-7 - Study historically

Week 5: Acts 8:9-25 - Paraphrase/Recall from memory

Week 6: Acts 10 - Read with a biblical commentary

## Appendix

Connection & Scripture Questions

Further Reading in Acts

# HOW

We don't expect that everyone will come to this study with the same background, or that we will land in the same places at its conclusion. We do expect all participants to commit to the journey together, seeking to hold Highrock's values of honesty, humility, and curiosity, while offering hospitality and solidarity to others in the group.

This study does not follow exactly Highrock's sermon series on the book of Acts (January 9<sup>th</sup> - February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022), although we hope that you will also engage this sermon series and bring insights from the preachers into your Small Group discussions. We invite you to engage with our questions for the Scripture text each week. Although these questions should serve as a guide for your discussion, they should by no means limit it.

Please honor the Conversation Covenant listed on the next pages. If you are using this with a group and can't attend one of the sessions, considering sharing a reflection with your Small Group members about what questions or thoughts the material raised for you that week. Consider creating a way people can share relevant articles, videos, or books that will help connect your group throughout the week, and to allow your meeting time to be more focused. Examples of this might be a Slack channel, a Facebook group, an email, or a text thread.

\*Important Note for the Engaging with Difficult Topics:

Experiences and backgrounds vary widely from person to person. The topics addressed by Scripture can be sensitive, perhaps some more than others for you. If the perspective in the week's suggested sermon or book doesn't resonate with you or reflect your experience or views, what did you learn from hearing another's story and bearing witness to their experience?

Pay attention to how you respond in your heart, mind, and body as you read and listen during this series. Allow these signals to inform you about where your boundaries are and what discussions are useful. If you would like to talk with any of our pastors, or are looking for support after these conversations, please reach out to [smallgroups@highrock.org](mailto:smallgroups@highrock.org) and we will help connect you to a pastor.

# PREP WORK

Before you begin this series, take 10-15 minutes to complete this short self-check in.

1. What do you hope to get out of this series?
2. List some of the ways you are feeling stagnant or stalled.
3. In this season of life how would you rate your feeling of busyness? What are some ways you cope with being hurried or overextended?
4. List some dreams of what it would be like to experience new life/wholeness.
5. Are there spiritual practices that are or have been part of your faith life? Are there any that have been intimidating to try?
6. As you review the Text & Topic list, are there any topics which could be difficult for you to discuss in a group setting? Note here for yourself some helpful boundaries or reminders for when that chapter is discussed.

# CONVERSATION COVENANT

I pledge:

To act in good faith, with curiosity. I will assume the best about my conversation partners when entering into our groups. I will give the benefit of the doubt recognizing that they may know something I don't.

To show respect. I will show respect. I will be polite and give due regard for the feelings and traditions of others. I understand that I do not have to agree with someone to show them respect.

To speak the truth. I won't use rhetorical tricks to try to win an argument. I will speak what I genuinely believe is the nuanced truth.

To aim to discover the truth. I will not enter into a conversation with the purpose of changing the mind of anyone to my way of thinking.

To focus on what we can change. I will focus on what we can do differently in the future since we cannot change what we did in the past.

To take responsibility for the conversation. I will take responsibility for the quality of the conversation and the abidance of the rules both in principle and in spirit.

To follow the covenant even when others fail to do so. I will abide by the rules regardless of whether another person breaks them.

To lighten-up and approach the conversation in good humor. I recognize that humor is a hallmark of a constructive, generative conversation and take the conversation in good humor.

See original resource [here](#).

## Facilitator Notes

- A. Before each gathering, star two or three questions you want to be sure your group addresses in case you run short on time.
- B. Be mindful of the "room" and creating a posture for group members to show up as they are in accordance with the Conversation Covenant.
- C. The topics covered will not be neutral territory for everyone. The work of moving beyond an US vs. THEM mindset can be a life-long journey.
- D. Binary thinking is often rooted in hurt or a need for self-preservation or "rightness". Therefore, always encourage a posture of curiosity when strong feelings and perspectives arise. There is usually more going on under the surface and it is up to the participant to lead the way in self-disclosure as well as personal transformation.
- E. It is not the work of this group or the facilitator to make anyone change their minds. But rather through following the Conversation Covenant, show up honestly and authentically to work through the material as a community on the journey together.
- F. If discussion of topics becomes too Big Picture, remind people to make it more personal by using "I statements".
- G. You always have support and resources available: [smallgroups@highrock.org](mailto:smallgroups@highrock.org)

# WEEKLY RHYTHMS

In this study, participants will be introduced to different exercises to utilize in their reading of the selected text in Acts for that week. Each week is intended to build upon the last. For example, the methods of engaging with the text in one week may certainly be used in the following weeks. Week One and Two especially serve as foundational approaches to reading Scripture. Participants are encouraged to do their own reading/reflection each week and then bring their thoughts/questions/observations to their Small Group discussion.

Since the objective of this study is to encounter the Holy Spirit through reading the Bible, at the end of each week all participants are asked to consider these questions after the reading:

- How does this text form/shift/expand your picture of the Holy Spirit?
- How has this encounter with Scripture informed how you engage with people?
- How has this encounter with Scripture informed how you relate to God personally?
- How has this encounter with Scripture led you into deeper participation in God's purposes?

While this study sets up these questions as closing questions for the week, they may also frame your intentions and/or prayers going into the next week. Use them as a reminder to read the Scripture text each week, considering how you might connect more with God personally, God's purposes, and God's people.

# WEEK 1: LECTIO DIVINA

## INSTRUCTIONS/OBJECTIVES

In this first week, we engage in a Lectio Divina reading of Acts 1:1-11. Lectio Divina is a spiritual practice of reading the Scriptures in a meditative, slow, and prayerful way. We start off this series reading Acts with a prayerful, spiritual practice as a reminder that when we read the Bible it is not simply to come away with informational knowledge. This practice helps us read Scripture to connect with a living, loving God.

## LECTIO DIVINA: 4 MOVEMENTS

**Read** - Slowly read and re-read the passage several times, fully entering into the text. This step is an invitation to be intentionally slow and deliberate in your reading. Breathe. There's no rush.

**Meditate** - Meditate on the text by allowing your focus to be pulled to what part of the passage you are naturally drawn to. Maybe that is a phrase, or a word, or an image. You may want to even write it down or draw a picture of it. Be open to the Holy Spirit in this feeling of pulling and meditation. Know that your meditation does not necessarily mean making sense of the passage.

**Pray** - With the text at hand, direct your attention to God in prayer. Engage with God about this passage. Ask yourself what the text means to you and how God is addressing you personally through the text. Know that your prayer may take different forms: praise, lamentation, petition, thanksgiving; it may be formulaic, or your prayer may even be silence with God.

**Contemplate** - In this step, rest and just be with God—this is your contemplation. Rest and abide.

The Lectio Divina movements may be done in one sitting or spread over a day or a few days. However you choose to practice Lectio Divina for this week, be intentional about setting aside enough time to go through each step. For more information about these steps and Lectio Divina itself visit <https://www.thecontemplativelife.org/lectio-divina>

## SCRIPTURE TEXT: ACTS 1:1-11 (NRSV)

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, "Men of

Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

How does this text form/shift/expand your picture of the Holy Spirit?

How has this encounter with Scripture informed how you will engage with people?

How has this encounter with Scripture informed how you relate to God personally?

How has this encounter with Scripture led you into deeper participation in God’s purposes?

## SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Opening connection questions & Optional Scripture Questions (See appendix, pg 21)

Share what stands out to you from the personal reflection section.

How was your experience of the Lectio Divina?

What did you learn from the experience?

Discuss your individual reflections from your Lectio Divina reading of the text and learn from one another.

Close in prayer.



# WEEK 2: LISTEN ATTENTIVELY TO THE TEXT

## INSTRUCTION/OBJECTIVES

This week is an invitation to listen attentively to the text by learning to ask questions of it. In other words, practice interrogating the biblical text! It's ok! God can handle our questions. The Holy Spirit may even move and speak to us through our questions.

Consider this list of questions as you read Acts 2 as a way to engage deeply with it:

What are your initial thoughts/questions regarding the text? How does this text make you feel?

Consider where this text begins and where it ends. Look for connections—what impact does what comes before/after have on the selected text?

Stand in the shoes of each of the characters. Taking a sympathetic view of the world of each character in the story—what do you notice or learn?

Explore the text looking for details that appear, at first glance, to be unusual or out of place. Take note of them or write down your questions.

Does the text have a center of gravity (i.e. a main thought around which all other thoughts are organized)? If so, what is it?

Is there conflict, either in the text itself or because of it, for the reader?

View the text through many different lenses: how would this passage appear to a man? A woman? A child? To people of different ethnicities/races? Rich, poor, homeless, prisoner, immigrant, etc.

Ask what the text is "doing." (Example: "Praise the Lord!" ...Is that the opening to an anthem or a rebuke to inattentive worshippers? "Come taste and see" ... is this an invitation or an encouragement?)

Consider the nature of your own questions as they arose. Where are your questions coming from? Are they coming from your own theological tradition? From intriguing aspects of the text itself? Your personal history/experience? Current local, national, or global events?

Read through Acts 2 fully. Then read it again. Using the list above, begin to interrogate the text and jot down your questions/thoughts in the space given here. If you'd like to go even further, repeat this exercise by reading and questioning the text on a different day or at a different time. Come prepared to share your thoughts/questions with your Small Group.

## SCRIPTURE TEXT: ACTS 2 (NRSV)

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,

1Phygyia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs – in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
and your sons and you daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

And I will show portents in the heaven above  
and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood,  
before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.

Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

“You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know – this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. For David says concerning him,

‘I saw the Lord always before me,  
for his is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken;  
therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;  
moreover my flesh will live in hope.

For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,  
or let your Holy One experience corruption.

You have made known to me the ways of life;  
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’

“Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying,

‘He was not abandoned to Hades,  
nor did his flesh experience corruption.’

This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he poured out this that you both see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

‘The Lord said to my Lord,  
“Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”’

Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God had made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”

So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all as

any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

How does this text form/shift/expand your picture of the Holy Spirit?

How has this encounter with Scripture informed how you will engage with people?

How has this encounter with Scripture informed how you relate to God personally?

How has this encounter with Scripture led you into deeper participation in God's purposes?

## SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Opening connection questions & Optional Scripture Questions (See appendix, pg 21)

Share what stands out to you from the personal reflection section.

Discuss the thoughts/questions that arose from your careful engagement with the text with others in your group.

Note any similarities or differences in what you noticed/read.

As a group choose one or two of the questions that came up and discuss some ways of wrestling with them. (Note: don't feel pressure to neatly answer all of them!)

Close in prayer.

# WEEK 3: READING TRANSLATIONS

## INSTRUCTION/OBJECTIVES

The Book of Acts was originally written in ancient Greek. This means that all our versions of the Bible are translations of that original version. Translations of the Bible are always products of multiple scholars who have spent their entire careers studying the historical context, original languages, and theological nuances of the texts that they translate in order to convey the best translation possible. Nevertheless, scholars often disagree on interpretations within translations. Therefore, it can be an insightful exercise to study a specific Scripture text using multiple translations.

The exercise for this week is to read Acts 4:31-5:11 in at least three different biblical translations. Note where the translations differ. Ask if the different translations could at all affect the meaning of the entire passage. (Bonus: if you speak/read another language, try reading a translation of the Bible in that language.)

Where can you find different translations? In a physical Bible you can always check which translation it is by flipping to the front pages. The Bible app YouVersion also allows you to read in different translations, as well as the Bible Gateway website (<https://www.biblegateway.com/>).

Below you will find the text already given in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) translation. To get you started, here is a description of some other common Bible translations (in English). The titles are linked to source content.

**NIV - New International Version:** Published in 1978, a standard translation using universally used English. It was written by a committee of evangelical scholars who all were in agreement about the Bible's "inerrancy and infallibility," and was written in response to a perceived bias of the RSV (the more commonly used version at the time, save the KJV). Verses can be paraphrased from the original text, affecting some meaning, as readability was the primary objective.

**NLT - New Living Translation:** An easy-to-read thought-by-thought translation from Hebrew and Greek. The NLT is a general-purpose text especially good for study, devotional reading, and reading aloud in worship services. Many words and phrases were rendered literally and consistently into English, preserving essential literary and rhetorical devices, ancient metaphors, and word choices that give structure to the text and provide echoes of meaning from one passage to the next. On the other hand, the NLT translators rendered the message more dynamically when the literal rendering was hard to understand, was misleading, or yielded archaic or foreign wording. They clarified difficult metaphors and terms to aid in the reader's understanding.

**KJV - King James Version:** authorized by King James I and is sometimes referred to as the "Authorized Version". It was translated by the Church of England as a means of securing Royal authority and was first published in 1611. It took its written cues from other English Renaissance works (think Shakespeare). With the arrival of the printing press, the KJV was printed and spread throughout the world, actually helping take religious power away from the throne. Its cultural impact, is still felt today as it is quoted in movies, songs, and speeches.

**NRSV- New Revised Standard Version:** The New Revised Standard is a popular translation that follows in the traditions of the King James and Revised Standard Versions. It was written with the goal of preserving the best of the older versions while incorporating modern English. Rooted in the past, but updated for today's Bible readers, the NRSV continues the tradition of William Tyndale, the King James Version, the American Standard Version, and the Revised Standard

Version. Equally important, it sets a new standard for the 21st Century. The NRSV stands out among the many translations because it is "as literal as possible" in adhering to the ancient texts and only "as free as necessary" to make the meaning clear in graceful, understandable English. It was revised with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and uses gender inclusive language when possible.

Two versions worth highlighting are the *People's Bible* and *The First Nations Version*. They both intentionally offer perspective, interpretations, and stories of those whose voices are not historically represented in Theological and Biblical Scholarship.

The People's Bible: "The Peoples' Bible highlights the role of cultures in shaping the Bible and the way people read the Bible today. Relying on the best insights of historical-critical, liberationist, postmodern, and postcolonial interpretation, the contributors include the editors of the volume plus Kosuke Koyama, Randall C. Bailey, Fernando F. Segovia, Elsa Tamez, Clarice Martin, Hee An Choi, Gale A. Yee, Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, and many more."

The First Nations Version: "The First Nations Version (FNV) is a retelling of the Creator's Story--the Scriptures--following the tradition of the storytellers of these oral cultures. Many First Nations tribes communicate with the cultural and linguistic thought patterns found in their original tongues. This way of speaking, with its simple yet profound beauty and rich cultural idioms, still resonates in the hearts of First Nations people. The FNV is a dynamic equivalence translation that captures the simplicity, clarity, and beauty of Native storytellers in English, while remaining faithful to the original language of the New Testament. Whether you are Native or not, you will experience the Scriptures in a fresh and new way."

## SCRIPTURE TEXT: ACTS 4:31-5:11 (NRSV)

**4:31** When they [the disciples] had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness. Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.

With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

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

**5:1** But a man named Ananias, with the consent of his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property; with his wife's knowledge, he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles' feet. "Ananias," Peter asked, "why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, were not the proceeds at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You did not lie to us but to God!" Now when Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard of it. The young men came and wrapped up his body, then carried him out and buried him.

After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you and your husband sold the land for such and such a price." And she said, "Yes, that was the price." Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Look, at the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." Immediately she fell down at his feet and died. When the young men came in they found her dead, so they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear seized the whole church and all who heard of these things.

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

How does this text form/shift/expand your picture of the Holy Spirit?

How has this encounter with Scripture informed how you will engage with people?

How has this encounter with Scripture informed how you relate to God personally?

How has this encounter with Scripture led you into deeper participation in God's purposes?

## SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Opening connection questions & Optional Scripture Questions (See appendix, pg 21)

Share what stands out to you from the personal reflection section.

How was your experience of reading the same passage in different translations?

What did you notice?

What questions arose for you?

Was there a part of the text that was easier or harder to understand when you looked at it across multiple translations?

Do you have a translation that you prefer (either in general or for this specific text), and if so, why?

Close in prayer.

# WEEK 4: STUDY HISTORICALLY

## INSTRUCTION/OBJECTIVES

Even as God moves through the Scriptures in all places, at all times, and among all people, each book of the Bible was written in a specific place, at a specific time, and to specific people. In other words, learning about the historical and cultural context within which a text was conceived and written supports our faithful and critical reading of Scripture itself. Good historical context is often provided in study Bibles (like the HarpersCollins Study Bible, for instance), in the introductions to books of the Bible, or in the verse-by-verse footnotes. Introductory content in most biblical commentaries also often provides historical context.

This week, we will study the historical and cultural context of Acts 6:1-7. First, read the text once or twice and engage with it in the same manner as Week 2. Take note of your thoughts and questions of the text. Next, read these additional materials, which provide some historical context for these verses. Dive into the verse-by-verse footnotes and investigate the other Scripture references as you go.

Consider: What difference does learning about the historical context make for this text? Are any of your questions answered, or do you have even more questions?

## SCRIPTURE TEXT: ACTS 6:1-7 (NRSV)

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

What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

How does this text form/shift/expand your picture of the Holy Spirit?

How has this encounter with Scripture informed how you will engage with people?

How has this encounter with Scripture informed how you relate to God personally?

How has this encounter with Scripture led you into deeper participation in God's purposes?

## SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Opening connection questions & Optional Scripture Questions (See appendix, pg 21)

Share what stands out to you from the personal reflection section.

How does knowing the historical context inform, support, or change your reading?

What did you learn from your historical study? Why might it matter who is telling the history we read?

Does this have applications in other areas of your life and relationships too?

Close in prayer.



# WEEK 5: PARAPHRASE & RECALL

## INSTRUCTION/OBJECTIVES

Recall and memory is often a funny thing! When we summarize or when we recall a story from memory we sometimes inadvertently change details or forget something. Sometimes we focus more on one aspect while pulling focus from another. It's also why re-reading stories is often so rewarding (especially if it's the Bible) because details we may have forgotten or never noticed can come to light. This week we will be putting this to the test to see what comes up!

The exercise for this week is to read through Acts 8:9-25 once or twice and then to:

**Paraphrase the text:** Write out a story summary using only 1-3 sentences

**Recall from memory:** Rewrite the story from memory, with as much detail as you can.

It's recommended that you do only one of these steps at a time; save the other step for another occasion in the week. Then compare your paraphrase or rewrite with the original text.

The goal is not to summarize or recall the passage perfectly! There is no right or wrong. This exercise is primarily about noticing what might have stood out to us in our paraphrase or memory and what was left out. Simply be curious about this!

In the space below, note similarities and differences between the actual text and your paraphrase/text-from-memory. Leading with curiosity, ask this question of yourself: why might there be those similarities/differences?

## SCRIPTURE TEXT: ACTS 8:9-25 (NRSV)

Now a certain man named Simon had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he was someone great. All of them, from the least to the greatest, listened to him eagerly, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." And they listened eagerly to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic.

But when they believed Philip, who was proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Even Simon himself believed. After being baptized, he stayed constantly with Philip and was amazed when he saw the signs and great miracles that took place.

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give me also this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain God's gift with money! You have no part or share in this, for your heart is not right before God. Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and the chains of wickedness." Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord that nothing of what you have said may happen to me."

Now after Peter and John had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, proclaiming the good news to many villages of the Samaritans.

Paraphrase and recall the text from memory here or on another sheet of paper. Then take notes on your comparison with the original text.

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

How does this text form/shift/expand your picture of the Holy Spirit?

How has this encounter with Scripture informed how you will engage with people?

How has this encounter with Scripture informed how you relate to God personally?

How has this encounter with Scripture led you into deeper participation in God's purposes?

## SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Opening connection questions & Optional Scripture Questions (See appendix, pg 21)

Share what stands out to you from the personal reflection section.

Share your paraphrase/text-from-memory with others in your group.

Discuss similarities/differences.

What was this exercise like for you?

What did you learn from the text and/or each other through this exercise?

Close in prayer.

# WEEK 6: READING A COMMENTARY

## INSTRUCTION/OBJECTIVES

Commentaries are works by biblical scholars and/or theologians who do a careful reading of the biblical text and historical interpretations of that text (by other scholars) and then present their own interpretation of the text based on their study. Although it is important that we each read and engage with the Bible on our own terms for connection to God, theological meaning, and spiritual insights, we can also learn a great deal from others—especially from scholars who dedicate themselves to studying Scripture.

This week you will read Acts 10 and then listen to a podcast interview with theologian Willie James Jennings. In the interview, Jennings discusses how he has interpreted the book of Acts towards the church's mission in his commentary, "[Acts: a Theological Commentary on the Bible](#)" (2017). You can buy this book from your favorite bookstore, if you're interested in engaging more.

First read Acts 10, engaging it in your own manner, and then listen to [Jennings's commentary](#) on it. Consider how his theological commentary informs, supports, or changes your reading. What did you learn from Jennings?

## SCRIPTURE TEXT: ACTS 10 (NRSV)

In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God.

One afternoon at about three o'clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius." He stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" He answered, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter; he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside." When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his slaves and a devout soldier from the ranks of those who served him, and after telling them everything, he sent them to Joppa.

About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air.

Then he heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean." The voice said to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.

Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared. They were asking for Simon's house and were standing by the gate. They called out to ask whether Simon, who was called Peter, was staying there. While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Look, three men are searching for you. Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them."

So Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for your coming?" They answered, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say."

So Peter invited them in and gave them lodging. The next day he got up and went with them, and some of the believers from Joppa accompanied him. The following day they came to Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. On Peter's arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshipped him.

But Peter made him get up, saying, "Stand up; I am only a mortal." And as he talked with him, he went in and found that many had assembled; and he said to them, "You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?"

Cornelius replied, "Four days ago at this very hour, at three o'clock, I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me. He said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter; he is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.' Therefore I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say."

Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, <sup>35</sup>but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ – he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, <sup>46</sup>for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

How does this text form/shift/expand your picture of the Holy Spirit?

How has this encounter with Scripture informed how you will engage with people?

How has this encounter with Scripture informed how you relate to God personally?

How has this encounter with Scripture led you into deeper participation in God's purposes?

## SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Opening connection questions & Optional Scripture Questions (See appendix, pg 21)

Share what stands out to you from the personal reflection section.

How does Jennings's theological commentary inform, support, or change your reading of Acts 10?

What did you learn from Jennings's commentary?

Close in prayer.

## DISCUSSION RESOURCES

Opening Connecting Questions (for facilitators and participants)

To get things going, try out one or more of these icebreaker questions with your Small Group each week.

What was a small win from your week?

On a scale of 1-10, how are you doing coming into this meeting?

If you had to give yourself a weather forecast for today, what would it be (i.e. what is your internal weather)? Example: sunny, partly cloudy, rainy with a chance of snow, etc.

Share a High/Low from your Day or Week.

If there was a soundtrack to your day, what would the music be?

### Scripture Discussion

If you would like a predictable pattern for your Scripture discussion, these five questions are from the ECC's Community Bible Experience:

What's something you noticed for the first time?

What questions did you have?

Was there anything that bothered you?

What did you learn about loving God?

What did you learn about loving others?

## SCRIPTURE RESOURCES

The role of the Bible in the context of the Evangelical Covenant Church

[A Covenant Resource Paper: The Evangelical Covenant Church and the Bible](#) (2008)

The Book of Acts:

González, Justo. Acts: the Gospel of the Spirit. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001.

Jennings, Willie James. Acts: a theological commentary on the Bible. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017.

Highrock's Winter 2022 sermon series on Acts (#goals): find sermon recordings on [Highrock's YouTube page](#)

Reading and engaging with Scripture:

[Covenant Community Bible Experience](#)

Lectio Divina: <https://www.thecontemplativelife.org/lectio-divina>