

EVERY DAY

THE LORD ADDED

TO THEIR NUMBER

“With Miracles, Wonders, and Signs”

by Allyson M. Howell

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After Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples were left with the promise that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and conquered sin will be given to them (Acts 1:8). What will happen when this power from the Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples? Since this power is from God, its use will be beautiful and will bring salvation to many. And how will the power of the Holy Spirit work to bring salvation? Through the church. It is through the proclamation of the gospel by God’s people that the nations will hear the good news!

For many of us, this is a scary and almost unbelievable truth. “You mean God will use me? But I am so weak. I am so scared. I am worried about my reputation. I don’t know how to do it.” While your fears may feel overwhelming, the reality is that God’s power rests on you! And when God’s people obey His commands and proclaim the gospel, God brings about repentance, baptism, fellowship, miracles, praise, and boldness—all with the purpose of bringing the nations into His kingdom.

We see each of these gifts from God played out in the book of Acts as God gave the disciples power through the Holy Spirit—the same power we have today!

THROUGH REPENTANCE, BAPTISM, AND FELLOWSHIP

When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, existing followers of Jesus were filled and begin speaking in many different languages. When the crowd misunderstood why this was happening, the disciples did not get offended, but instead shared the whole gospel—that Jesus came to save the world from sin and death. And because God’s power through the Holy Spirit was at work, thousands of people repented from their sins, obeyed Jesus’s command to be baptized, and gathered with God’s people to share everything they had and to fellowship.

These seemingly ordinary acts were incredible displays of God’s power. Every time a person understands and believes the gospel and turns away from a life of sin, it is an outworking of God’s power. Every time someone decides to proclaim

publicly their trust in Christ through baptism, that is an outworking of God's power. Every time we obey in gathering together to love, care for, and enjoy each other's presence, that too is an outworking of God's power. All these things are a result of the Holy Spirit working. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we can joyfully obey God's commands, trusting that obedience is more valuable than our feelings and our fears. This obedience by the power of the Spirit is what brought thousands into the church after Jesus ascended to heaven, and it is what brings people to salvation today.

THROUGH MIRACLES THAT PRODUCE PRAISE

God not only displays His power through repentance, baptism, and fellowship with the church, but also through miracles. Miracles are sometimes hard to understand. It is easy to swing on a pendulum of false teaching about them. On one end, there are those who believe miracles are not real, so they dismiss anything supernatural or unexplainable. On the other end, there are those who believe miracles are so essential to salvation that they make up fake spiritual gestures or mix them with evils such as witchcraft and divination.

When God's power is at work, even the fiercest opposition cannot destroy or thwart the gospel going forward.

But what we know from Scripture and the book of Acts is that miracles exist for the purpose of repentance from sin and for praising God. Any time a miracle occurs, it is an opportunity for believers to say: "Look at what God did! He is worthy of all of our praise!" For when God's power is on display, the response should not be to shrug it off. Instead,

as it was for all who were at the temple when a man who was lame began to walk, God's power in miracles should bring about repentance and praise. Miracles are one way that God chooses to draw many to Himself and lead them to the salvation they need.

THROUGH BOLDNESS DESPITE OPPOSITION

Our proclamation of the gospel might not always look like thousands repenting and miracles abounding as in Acts. Sometimes proclaiming the gospel brings about persecution. While most Americans are unfamiliar with the life-threatening persecution going on in many parts of the world, every Christian who has shared the gospel is familiar with opposition.

Despite imprisonment, Peter and John in Acts 4 stood boldly before the Jewish leadership and proclaimed the truth about Jesus. When they were released, they shared with the church about what happened to them, and the church did not waiver.

When God's power is at work, even the fiercest opposition cannot destroy or thwart the gospel going forward. There is a well-known quote by Tertullian, a member of the early church, saying, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."¹ What this implies is that persecution often has a reverse effect. Instead of silencing Christians or causing them to fear, their faithfulness and boldness in the face of opposition actually serves to strengthen the church and send the gospel out even further.

There is nothing that can come against the power of God and still stand. It is the call of every believer to grip firmly to God's power and declare the gospel so that many would be added to the church every day.

1. Tertullian, *Apologeticus pro Christianis* (Apology), Ch. 1, quoted in John Hunt, *AMG Concise Church History* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2008), 78.



THE CHURCH GROWS



+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. God's people are empowered to proclaim Jesus boldly (Acts 2:22-31).
2. God's people are empowered to call others to repentance (Acts 2:37-41).
3. God's people are empowered to live together as one (Acts 2:42-47).

Background Passage: Acts 2

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Both the bold preaching of Peter and the large number of people who trusted in Christ reveal the transformative power of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of people.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Peter's sermon at Pentecost, a mere fifty days after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, demonstrates the Holy Spirit's power to change those who trust in Jesus. The power of the gospel changed Peter, whom God used to preach Jesus to the crowd so that thousands would believe and be changed as well. All who believe in Jesus are changed, never to be the same.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we are a new creation in Christ, we seek to live according to our new identity as we put our old selves to death day by day.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.



INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **When were you able to do something that you thought was impossible and what gave you the power to do that task?** (gave a speech in front of a large audience where the power came from preparation; asked someone to marry me where the deep love I felt overcame my fears; grieved the death of a loved one where people around me supported and cared for me)

TRANSITION: The disciples were given a massive mission to take the message of Jesus to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). In order to accomplish this mission they would need God's power and help. He promised the help would come in the person of the Holy Spirit (1:4-5). The Spirit came (2:1-13), and the unique power of the Spirit rested upon people to such an extent that witnesses thought, "These people are drunk!" Their accusation provided the backdrop for Peter's first recorded sermon, in which he argued that the Christians were not drunk but filled with God's Spirit. The Spirit's activity, Peter would contend, was evidence that God's saving plan for humanity came into the world through Jesus Christ.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- The Holy Spirit came to the first followers of Jesus. They then had the power they needed to take the gospel to the nations (Acts 1:8). This work started with Peter, who boldly and clearly proclaimed the good news about Jesus to the people who had gathered for the Pentecost celebration. God's power through the Holy Spirit was on display, both in the message Peter proclaimed and in the response of those who believed.



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POINT 1

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE EMPOWERED TO PROCLAIM JESUS BOLDLY (ACTS 2:22-31).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 2:22-24** from his or her Bible.

22 “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— **23** this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. **24** God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

DISCUSS: In groups of 3-4, ask: “What would have made it difficult for Peter to share this message to this group?” (many Jews still were antagonistic toward Jesus and His disciples; the leaders were still trying to dismantle the group of Jesus followers; there was a real threat of danger to their lives; Peter’s message put guilt on the people)

EXPLAIN: Discuss **verses 22-24** and the following main idea (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 94):

Peter’s focus was that the death and resurrection of Jesus was the fulfillment of God’s promised plan to save sinners and redeem the world.

- Peter—who had abandoned and denied Jesus, was restored by Him, and here, was empowered by the Holy Spirit—is recorded as one of the first Christians to proclaim the good news boldly.
- Peter was clear that Jesus’s death was due to both the people’s actions and God’s intention. Jesus was delivered up “according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God” (v. 23), which shows us that nothing that happened to Jesus was an accident or somehow a deviation from God’s will. Yet, the Jews “crucified and killed [Him] by the hands of lawless men.” In other words, the Jews and the Romans were complicit in Jesus’s death, active participants in the tragedy of the cross. But Peter ended his sermon by once again returning to God’s plan. Yes, evil men killed Jesus, but God raised Him up.
- Peter continued by saying that death could not hold Jesus. Death was no match for Him, proving that Jesus is God the Son.

ASK: (DDG p. 94)

What do we learn about what is needed to share the good news of Jesus through Peter’s sermon? (boldness; clarity; cultural contextualization; language of our audience; fact that we need to share about Jesus as a real man of history, that Jesus was crucified and resurrected, and that this was all a part of God’s plan; that Jesus saves us from death)

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“Christ’s death was a stumbling block to the Jews. The apostles responded to this issue by presenting it as a victory that had been planned by God. It was not the unfortunate defeat of a good man who had no power to save himself from such a death.”¹

–Ajith Fernando

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 2:25-31** from his or her Bible.

25 For David says concerning him, ‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; **26** therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. **27** For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. **28** You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’ **29** Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. **30** Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, **31** he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.

CHALLENGE: In groups of 3-4, ask: “Why might Peter have used David to illustrate his point here?” (Peter knew his audience; the Jews honored David but needed a reminder that he too was waiting for a Messiah; Peter was bridging the gap between their understanding of Jewish history and Jesus)

EXPLAIN: Use the main idea below and **verses 25-31** to explain (DDG p. 94):

Peter, knowing his audience, spoke of David to point to Jesus as the true King who conquered death.

- David was the great king of Israel. Though he was flawed, there was no one worthy of more respect than this man after God’s own heart. He’d been used by God to usher Israel into one of the greatest chapters of peace and prosperity in its history. However, David was now dead. His body was in the ground—decayed in a tomb.
- Even David knew that this would be his fate. That’s why Peter quoted David in Psalm 110:1, where David looked to the heavens and saw the Messiah, who would rule and reign on His throne forever. David could rejoice in this future reality. Though David would die, there would be One who would come after him who would conquer death. The reality of David’s death surely made the people long for the true King who would never die.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 94)

Why is it important to know our audience to better spread the message of the gospel? (understanding your audience helps in contextualizing your message through their cultural lens; rich or poor, educated or uneducated, someone with a Christian background or no religious background, all need a starting point and a bridge to help them understand the message of salvation)

TRANSITION: Because of the power of the Holy Spirit, many of those listening to Peter’s sermon did not merely hear with their ears, but also with their heart.

HADES

Greek word for the place of death, where disembodied souls go. Its Hebrew equivalent was *Sheol*. Ultimately God reigns over all places, including Hades.

POINT 2

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE EMPOWERED TO CALL OTHERS TO REPENTANCE (ACTS 2:37-41).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 2:37-38** from his or her Bible.

37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" **38** And Peter said to them, "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.

ILLUSTRATE: Read Hebrews 4:12 aloud. In Hebrews 4:12 and in our passage, the Word of God acts like a sharp knife or sword. In the wrong hands, a sharp blade can do all sorts of harm. But in the right hands, a sharp knife is desirable, even useful. In a master chef's hands, a sharp knife makes way for a delicious meal. The Word of God in the mouth of a Christian works much the same way. It can be used powerfully to change the lives of those with whom we share.

HIGHLIGHT: Discuss from **verses 37-38** the main idea below (DDG p. 94):

Those whose hearts are pierced by the gospel message repent and are baptized in Jesus's name.

- In Matthew 13:1-23, Jesus described the spread of the gospel like a farmer scattering seed. Some seed fell in hard places and failed to produce fruit. Other seed fell on fertile soil and produced a harvest. Here Peter's message fell on fertile soil. He didn't even have to ask them to respond—rather, they asked him and the other apostles what they should do about the message they just heard.
- It's worth pausing to notice what the apostles did not do here. They did not give the people a lengthy list of moral objectives to obey. They didn't send them to a class. They did not ask them to develop intricate theological positions or doctrinal statements. The call was simple—repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.
- Repentance starts on the inside. The word denotes a complete change of direction—someone is walking one way and they turn around and walk in the opposite direction. To make this change, the heart must be willing to admit that pursuing sin is to go in the wrong direction. The heart must also see that a relationship with God through Jesus Christ is the best and right way to live. This isn't to suggest that repentance is purely inward. Any true inward repentance will demonstrate itself in external change.
- Baptism is outward. The word denotes immersion under water and follows the pattern of Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection by placing the person under the water and then raising them up again. Baptism is an outward sign of inward repentance. Those who are baptized say to the world that they have turned from sin and are now united with Jesus and following Him.

ASK: (DDG p. 94)

Why do you think Peter combines repentance and baptism as a response to the gospel? (because that was John the Baptist's message and Jesus's as well; with repentance we see our sinful nature and need of a Savior to help us turn our life around, and baptism is a tangible action point that shows a public display of our faith; both involve confessions of our heart)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 2:39-41** from his or her Bible.

39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." **40** And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." **41** So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

EXPLAIN: Using **verses 39-41**, explain the main idea below (DDG p. 94):

The promise of the Spirit is for everyone who chooses to believe, until Jesus returns. And through the work of the Spirit, God's kingdom will grow.

- The blessing and hope given to humanity is that those who choose to believe can have this promise of the Spirit as well, for generations and generations who choose Jesus.
- Peter continued to speak, although Luke doesn't record what he said except to exhort the crowd to "save yourselves from this crooked generation," a bold warning indeed.
- It's astounding to think that we could have 3,000 people baptized all on the same day. The sermon wasn't unique—it was a simple and clear message about Jesus Christ. The power came from the work of God's Spirit in the lives of those who heard. God transformed lives and these transformed lives were the foundation of the early church.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 94)

From Day 3 in the DDG: **How does the Holy Spirit shape your life?** (He helps me be bold in sharing the gospel; He reminds me of God's presence; He keeps me kingdom-minded; He guides my life choices; He convicts me when I'm not doing what I'm supposed to, or when I'm doing what I'm not supposed to)

TRANSITION: Sinners were changed in an instant by the Holy Spirit, and as God's newly formed people, they continued to live dramatically transformed lives.

POINT 3

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE EMPOWERED TO LIVE TOGETHER AS ONE (ACTS 2:42-47).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 2:42-45** from his or her Bible.

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. **43** And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. **44** And all who believed were together and had all things in common. **45** And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.

IDENTIFY: Invite the group to identify and call out various facets of the life of the early church as seen in **verses 42-45** while you record them on the board. Note that this passage is not meant to be a full treatment of everything the church did, nor is it intended to be the sole guide for what the church should do today.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read the key doctrine below (DDG p. 95). Then use the points below to further highlight the activities mentioned in this passage.

Key Doctrine #79: Body of Christ: The New Testament describes the church as the body of Christ. The church lives and operates as Christ's representative here on earth, with Christ as its head (Col. 1:18). This means that the church is an extension of Christ's ministry, carrying out His work by fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). In addition, the picture of the church as the body of Christ shows us the interconnectedness of individual Christians, with each member dependent upon one another for growth and sanctification (1 Cor. 12).

- "Devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (v. 42) shows that the Word of God marked the life of the church; the people were regularly submitting themselves to God's truth.
- "The fellowship" shows that the people were not only together, but they were invested in meaningful relationships.
- "To the breaking of bread" shows that they shared meals together, and that perhaps they partook of the Lord's Supper together.
- "The prayers" shows that they did not merely pray individually but they spent time praying with other Christians.
- Luke ends his list of activity to describe that all these led to awe and wonder from those around them as the apostles continued to perform miracles.
- In addition, we see the fact that these Christians were sharing their possessions with one another (vv. 44-45). This practice was not necessitated by the apostles or church. Rather, it was the outworking of the generous hearts of those who had been transformed by the gospel. They cared for each other in real and tangible ways.

ASK: (DDG p. 95)

How can you be a part of building up the body in your church? (serving in different ministries; not gossiping; opening my home for a small group; being committed in prayer; being intentional in relationships with other believers)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 2:46-47** from his or her Bible.

46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, **47** praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

INSTRUCT: Look at the characteristics of the early church members' hearts in **verses 46-47** and explain (DDG p. 95):

Devotion, joy, and sincerity are the fruit of believers as they strive to be one body and grow with the Lord's power.

- Luke wanted us to know that the early church was devoted, joyful, sincere, praising, and enjoying. Doing Christian activities isn't a check-off list to do with a bad attitude. The people were filled with joy and thankfulness for their new life in Christ and the new family of believers they were called into.
- In verses 43 and 47, we see the Lord performed wonders. In verse 43, those wonders are not defined, but one would surmise that they were a continuation of the acts of healing done by the apostles in the Gospel accounts. In verse 47, these wonders are the conversion of sinners. The signs and wonders done by the apostles were meant to validate their message about Jesus, leading to the salvation of those who would believe. Like in the Old Testament account of God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, God often uses signs and wonders to help others believe His message.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 95)

With what attitudes do you perform Christian activity or service?
(be prepared to give your honest answers to start off the group)

SUMMARIZE: Use **PACK ITEM 11: SEEING THE OLD IN THE NEW** to summarize the first three lines under the heading, showing how God has always planned to build Himself a people from many nations. The Spirit, poured out on the disciples, emboldened Peter to preach the good news. And the coming of the Spirit, in contrast to the events at the Tower of Babylon, allowed people to hear the gospel in their own language. In this way, God fulfilled His promise of the Holy Spirit. Remind your group to keep this handout for future sessions.



MY RESPONSE

SAY: Peter’s sermon at Pentecost, a mere fifty days after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, demonstrates the Holy Spirit’s power to change those who trust in Jesus. The power of the gospel changed Peter, whom God used to preach Jesus to the crowd so that thousands would believe and be changed as well. All who believe in Jesus are changed, never to be the same. Because we are a new creation in Christ, we seek to live according to our new identity as we put our old selves to death day by day.

HEAD:

We’ve seen that the resurrection validates that Jesus is who He says He is—the long-awaited promised Messiah who would sit on David’s throne and rule and reign over God’s people. Those who believe this truth allow God to reign over their lives as well. We repent of sin and turn to Jesus in faith, both to begin our journey as a Christian and throughout our lives as Christians.

Where are you being asked to repent and believe today?

HEART:

Those who first heard this message were pierced to their heart. The Word of God has the power to do just that. When we see our sin and Jesus’s holiness, we are exposed in our innermost being. The thoughts and feelings that we often like to keep locked inside are exposed when we compare our lives to the resurrected King Jesus.

How is your heart pierced as you think about what Jesus has done for you?

HANDS:

God’s people live out the practices of Acts 2:42-47 in the local church. There they submit to the Word preached and taught, live in fellowship, share their possessions, pray, and break bread with others. These are the normative habits of all of God’s people, and these should be marked by joy and thankfulness. And when the church does such things in such a way, they might see God multiplying His people in numbers.

How can your engagement with the local church lead to kingdom growth?

PRAY: Father, thank You for saving sinners through Jesus Christ. We praise You for Your Son who overcame death and proved that He is the God-appointed Savior. We ask that You would give us the humility to repent of our sins and the joy to model Your love toward us in our relationship with Your church. Amen.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“They made the grace of God credible by a society of love and mutual care which astonished the pagans and was recognized as something entirely new. It lent persuasiveness to their claim that the New Age had dawned in Christ.”²

—Michael Green
(1930–2019)

POINT 1: GOD’S PEOPLE ARE EMPOWERED TO PROCLAIM JESUS BOLDLY (ACTS 2:22-31).

+ COMMENTARY

“In the paradox of divine sovereignty and human freedom, Jesus died as the result of deliberate human decision made in the exercise of their God-given freedom of choice. The Jewish crowd at Pentecost could not avoid their responsibility in Jesus’ death. Nonetheless, in the mystery of the divine will, God was working in these events of willful human rebellion to bring about his eternal purposes, bringing out of the tragedy of the cross the triumph of the resurrection. The Jews were not alone in their responsibility for Jesus’ death, however. They worked through the agency of ‘lawless men’ (‘wicked,’ NIV), a term used by Jews to designate Gentiles. Jesus died on a Roman cross; Gentiles too shared in the guilt. Peter carefully balanced all the participants in the drama of Jesus’ death—the guilt of the Jew and Gentile alike, the triumphal sovereignty of God.”³

+ ILLUSTRATION

Pick any latest news story or event in your church and ask what caused that event to come to pass. Nothing in life has a singular cause. We might guess at the most important cause, but it’s impossible to isolate a single cause for any event. For example, try to isolate a cause for a school shooting or other act of violence. Obviously dozens of factors not only influence the act itself, but also influence when and where the act takes place. We can’t say it’s either this cause or that cause, when it’s almost always many different causes conspiring together. Or consider the factors that go into a child growing up to being a mature and contributing member of society. It’s not one cause alone, such as a stable home life, but multiple factors working together. This is the point Peter is making regarding Jesus’s death. His death was caused by human agents and by the supreme purposes of God. Both were at work and neither negates the other.

+ ILLUSTRATION

Russell Brownworth recounts a story:

“While I was attending seminary, our two older children (ages 9 and 7) seemed to attract every other child in the mobile-home park for after-school games of hide-and-seek. Our youngest, Carrie, was not quite 3—and (in the minds of the older siblings) always in the way. It was

EXTRA

something you could count on; ten minutes into the games our little one would get pushed aside or skin a knee. One afternoon she came through the front door crying for Mommy. She had gotten the worst again. My wife, Elizabeth, attempted to comfort her by giving her two freshly baked cookies. “Now, don’t tell the big kids yet,” she cautioned. “I haven’t finished; I haven’t got enough for everybody yet.” It took less than three seconds for Carrie to make it to the screen door, fling it wide, and announce to the big kids, “Cookies, I gots cookies!” Great news should be shared with enthusiasm!”⁴

Like the child proclaiming good news, so did Peter proclaim the good news of Jesus in his sermon, out of passion, joy, excitement, and exhilaration. So, also, must we proclaim the good news to those around us today.

POINT 2: GOD’S PEOPLE ARE EMPOWERED TO CALL OTHERS TO REPENTANCE (ACTS 2:37-41).

+ **COMMENTARY**

“The context of Peter’s statement is that he is responding to the question posed by the crowd in verse 37: ‘Brothers, what must we do?’ At this point the crowd had already come under conviction, accepting as true the theological conclusion Peter had stated in verse 36: ‘God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah!’ Now, in response to their question and realizing that faith had already dawned in their hearts, Peter shares the application that is to follow belief in Christ. The application has three basic parts: (1) repent, (2) be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and (3) receive the gift of the Spirit.”⁵

+ **ILLUSTRATION**

Ask your group to imagine that they were part of taking the gospel to a remote village who had never heard the name of Jesus. After presenting the gospel message akin to Peter’s sermon in Acts 2, you notice that many of your hearers are moved by the message about Jesus. They appeal to a translator and ask what they should do now. What do you tell them? The simplicity of the context allows for a simple response. They don’t have big churches or all of the practices that seem to attach themselves to faith in many developed contexts. You would need to start with the very basic aspects of salvation. They simply need to repent and be baptized. This is where faith always starts. From there, you can encourage them with many of the habits that are found later in the book of Acts. The place to begin, however, is repentance and baptism. The reality of these simple directives should cause consideration for how we respond to those who want to trust Jesus today. Do we give them many hoops they have to jump through, or do we simply invite them to repent, be baptized, and follow Jesus?

POINT 3: GOD'S PEOPLE ARE EMPOWERED TO LIVE TOGETHER AS ONE (ACTS 2:42-47).

+ COMMENTARY

“Luke presents in this paragraph an ideal picture of this new community, rejoicing in the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit. The community, the apostolic fellowship, was constituted on the basis of the apostolic teaching. This teaching was authoritative because it was the teaching of the Lord communicated through the apostles in the power of the Spirit. For believers of later generations the New Testament scriptures form the written deposit of the apostolic teaching. The apostolic succession is recognized most clearly in those churches which adhere most steadfastly to the apostolic teaching.”⁶

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

Ask the group to reflect on their best church experience. People tend to enjoy sharing about some of the hurts they've experienced in the church in the past. In fact, #churchhurt has become a common way for people to discuss the complexity of life in the church. It's important that we hear, listen, and learn from these stories; but there are countless examples of good that people have experienced through the ministry of the local church as well. The group may not be made up of people who have a background in the local church, but even those who have not grown up in and around the church are often impacted by local church ministry. For example, they may have visited a church as a kid or gone on a youth camp in the summer. These positive stories help give us hope of what the church can become. As people share, hold up the marks of the church found in Acts 2:42-47 to show your group that many of the things we love the most about the church are habits of the people of God from the first century until today. Consider ending the time praying and giving thanks to God for the gift of the church.

+ ILLUSTRATION

General Colin Powell wrote:

On the speech circuit, I tell a story that goes to the heart of America's longing. ABC correspondent Sam Donaldson was interviewing a young African-American soldier in a tank platoon on the eve of the battle in Desert Storm. Donaldson asked, “How do you think the battle will go? Are you afraid?” “We'll do okay. We're well trained. And I'm not afraid,” the GI answered, gesturing toward his buddies around him. “I'm not afraid because I'm with my family.” The other soldiers shouted, “Tell him again. He didn't hear you.” The soldier repeated, “This is my family, and we'll take care of each other.”⁷

How much more should the family of God take care of each other!

References

1. Ajith Fernando, Acts, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 109.
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3. John B. Polhill, Acts, vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 112.
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