

THE CHURCH MEETS NEEDS



+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. God's people serve others to display God's works (Acts 3:1-7).
2. God's people challenge others to recognize God's Son (Acts 3:11-16).
3. God's people invite others to experience God's presence (Acts 3:17-20).

Background Passage: Acts 3

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

In healing the man who was lame, Peter and John displayed God's power to him and all those around and pointed to a greater, spiritual healing found in Christ.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Once the Holy Spirit was given, the disciples began boldly proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit displayed the power of God's kingdom through the miracles the disciples performed in Jesus's name for His glory and praise.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we have experienced the miracle of our salvation from sin and new life in Jesus, we boldly and graciously proclaim the gospel and minister to those in need.

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: **What are different ways society views those who are poor or those who beg for help?** (many may be prone to ignore the poor; some may think they are taking advantage of others; maybe they are just lazy; maybe they desire the fate they are experiencing; some might know friends who have been poor and needy so they are prone to want to help; others may feel themselves overcome with compassion and they may seek to help everyone they can)

TRANSITION: Jesus told His followers that they would always have the poor among them (Matt. 26:11). This may sound like a defeatist posture, but Jesus was honest about the implications of sin and brokenness in the world. Until He returns and puts the world back together again, there will always be those who are needy and hurting among us. This reality should come as no surprise to us when we consider our world. We truly do always have the poor among us. Every place, regardless of how whole and beautiful it might seem from the outside, has an underbelly of brokenness. How should Christians respond to such pain?

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

- As we continue in the book of Acts, we notice brokenness entered the story quickly. The first Christians had been together—sharing their resources and possessions with one another as any had need (Acts 2:42-47). They now moved out into the world, and there they met a man who had been lame from birth. Through this story, we will see how the generosity that marked the people of God in the church spilled over into their care for those on the outside, especially those who were hurting and broken.



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POINT 1

GOD'S PEOPLE SERVE OTHERS TO DISPLAY GOD'S WORKS (ACTS 3:1-7).

INTRODUCE: The early church was together—celebrating God's goodness, sharing in fellowship, praying, learning, and meeting one another's needs (Acts 2:42-47). Empowered by the Spirit and the love of the people, the apostles now ventured out into the world. They had been tasked with the mission of taking the good news of Jesus from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Now, in Acts 3, we start to see the impact of the gospel message.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 3:1-3** from his or her Bible.

1 Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. **2** And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. **3** Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms.

EXPLAIN: In **verses 1-3**, we see Peter and James about to engage with a man who was lame, begging for money. Disciples today should know that we too are called to engage in social concerns. Invite someone to read the key doctrine (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 102):

Key Doctrine #94: Social Concern: All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the Spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends, Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth (Mic. 6:8; Eph. 6:5-9; 1 Thess. 3:12).

HIGHLIGHT: Using the notes below, continue to explain **verses 1-3**:

- Peter and James still regularly went to the temple, including for times of prayer. They did so as pious Jews and also to engage with fellow Jews for opportunities to spread the gospel to them.
- The Beautiful Gate would have been a prime place for this beggar to come as it was at a place where people were coming to and going from the temple.

HOURLY OF PRAYER

The temple schedule, in the time of the early church, daily had Jews come for the offering of the morning and evening sacrifices, one after dawn and one mid-afternoon, around 3 pm. Both would include a time of prayer and a time to wait for the blessing from a priest.

The beggar probably assumed that worshipers of God would be most likely to meet his needs. Gates in Jesus's day marked a primary means of entering a city and various essential locations within the city. So the gate was a heavily trafficked area. We aren't told how long the man had been coming there, only that he had been born lame and was carried there every day.

ASK: (DDG p. 102)

How is our social concern a testimony of our love for Christ? (we love others because He loved us first; we are the hands and feet of Jesus; in following Jesus, we do as He would in loving the marginalized; the Bible is full of passages of our need to serve the poor and helpless; loving those who can't really love us back is a testimony of the unconditional love of Christ in our lives)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **verses 4-7** from his or her Bible.

4 And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us."
5 And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. **6** But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" **7** And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong.

DEBATE: Break into two smaller groups. Each group debate will their reasons for each side of the argument: "What would have been better? For the man to receive money or to receive healing?"

EXPLAIN: Referring to **verses 4-7**, explain the main idea below (DDG p. 102):

As we are called to social concerns, our ultimate goal is to display God's work and point to Jesus, our Savior.

- The beggar asked for money, but the apostles offered healing "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth." Here the apostles were representing Jesus Christ and pointing to Him in a way reminiscent of His own ministry (Matt. 8:16-17; 12:22; Mark 1:29-31; 3:1-6,10-11; 7:31-37; Luke 5:12-14; 7:11-18; John 4:46-54).
- If we continued in Acts 3:8, we would see the man walking, leaping, and praising God, beginning to understand the power of Jesus and who He is. Miracles shine the spotlight on Jesus and His great power.

TRANSITION: Like in Acts 2, where a miracle (2:1-13) was followed by a sermon (2:14-36), after Acts 3:1-7, the focus shifted to another sermon by Peter.

POINT 2

GOD'S PEOPLE CHALLENGE OTHERS TO RECOGNIZE GOD'S SON (ACTS 3:11-16).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 3:11-12** from his or her Bible.

11 While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's. **12** And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?"

EXPLAIN: Using **verses 11-12**, point out the humility in Peter's tone as he questioned the people's astonishment. Explain the point below (DDG p. 103):

We humbly serve others to testify about Jesus.

- Peter did not allow the people to stew in their astonishment; instead, he addressed the Israelites directly. He would go on to connect Jesus's healing of this man to the story of God's work with the Israelites and mention key figures in their history: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

ASK: (DDG p. 103)

How can we remain humble in ministry successes? (pray often in those endeavors; be the person in the group that acknowledges God as sovereign in our successes or failures; let the Holy Spirit guide us to a posture of humility)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 3:13-16** from his or her Bible.

13 The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. **14** But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, **15** and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. **16** And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all."

LIST: Ask groups of 2-4 to look over verses 13-16 and list various aspects of Peter's sermon that would help us know how we should share the gospel today. Invite groups to share their list.

HIGHLIGHT: Using your group's answers from **verses 13-16**, add any additional items from the list in the main idea on the next page. Then explain that main idea (DDG p. 103):

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"If indeed it was all the prophets and not only one of them who said this, it follows that, although the event took place through ignorance, it did not take place contrary to God's ordinance. See how great is the wisdom of God, when it uses the wickedness of others to bring about what must be."¹

—Chrysostom
(c. 347–407)

Sharing the gospel includes contextualizing and focusing on Jesus's death and resurrection and the need for faith to believe in Him.

- Once again, Peter reminded the people—witnesses of Jesus's miraculous healings when He lived—of their complicity in Jesus's sham trial and crucifixion. But he also mentioned how God has now glorified Christ, pointing to both Jesus's death and resurrection.
- It would have been easy for Peter and the apostles to grow inflated with pride as they healed this man in front of a busy crowd. Instead, they gave all the glory to Jesus. Christians today should live to deflect attention away from themselves and onto the risen Christ. They should know, like the apostles surely knew here, that Jesus is the source of life, not them.
- Faith and trust are close synonyms. They are both active words. People model faith when they get on an airplane. We can say that we believe planes can fly or even understand the laws of aerodynamics, but it's not faith until we are willing to trust the plane and step inside. In the same way, in the Bible faith is an active word. It describes a strong belief in something or someone that compels action.
- Notice the three-fold repetition of "Jesus" and "his name" in verse 16. It is faith "in his name." "His name" is what made the man strong. And again, faith comes "through Jesus." The apostles were not healing in their name or power, but in Jesus's. And their faith had a clear object—Jesus Christ. It's unclear from the passage who had the faith; perhaps it was the apostles' faith and the faith of the man, but Jesus performed the action. This is why many suggest that the book of Acts is a continuation of Jesus's work that Luke summarized in his Gospel. Even though Jesus is in heaven He continues to work in the world through His people.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 103)

How can our service point more directly to Jesus? (if serving in a church ministry capacity, we can encourage others to join that they may see how Jesus is working in the lives of church members and their growth; if serving in the community, we can point to Jesus as why we are serving—because our love for Christ compels us to joyfully serve strangers; if we are serving in our job, we can live differently than the world, expressing the love of Christ as the reason we work with joy and strong ethics; if we are serving our family, we can point to Jesus as the reason for our rules and discipline as well for His provision and joy in our family life)

TRANSITION: Peter followed the pattern of his sermon in Acts 2 by pointing his hearers to the work of Jesus Christ. In the first instance, the sermon ended with the hearers asking what they should do, and Peter responded that they should repent and be baptized. Now in Acts 3 that same theme would conclude Peter's sermon once again.

POINT 3

GOD'S PEOPLE INVITE OTHERS TO EXPERIENCE GOD'S PRESENCE (ACTS 3:17-20).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 3:17-20** from his or her Bible.

17 “And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. **18** But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. **19** Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, **20** that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus.”

EXPLAIN: Reiterating a previous session, though the people were complicit, God was also fulfilling His plan through the death of Jesus. And because it was all God's work to save humanity, we are called to share that good news. Using the points below as seen in **verses 17-19**, discuss (DDG p. 103):

Jesus's forgiveness extends to all when they repent.

- The Jews in Peter's audience were guilty in condemning Jesus. However, Peter highlighted a theme common in the Scriptures. He said that the people “acted in ignorance.” Paul used the same language in Acts 17:30-31 in speaking about the time before Jesus's death and resurrection. But God was gracious by not destroying those who killed Jesus in that moment. But even sinning with ignorance necessitates repentance. Sin is sin and those who sin, which is everyone, except Jesus, need to repent.
- God had a plan. The Messiah would suffer, and Jesus did, fulfilling prophecy. Because He did, many can return to the Lord through repentance.
- God's mercy is seen in this passage, allowing people to repent to find forgiveness. How amazing to think that all of our sins, all of our failures, can be wiped out like this.

ASK: (DDG p. 103)

How can we help lead others to repentance? (tell them of the gift of true forgiveness; tell them of God's love and mercy; tell them that God desires to have a relationship with them; tell them eternal life is a gift through Jesus; tell them of the need to find a better way to live life)

HIGHLIGHT: Paul continued with some reasons why they should repent. Discuss from **verse 20** (DDG p. 103):

With repentance comes refreshment from God's presence as we await the day of Jesus's return.

DIG: In groups of 2-4, ask: "What does *refreshing* look like or feel like?" (peace; calmness; satisfaction; fullness; fulfillment; an iced cold sweet tea on a July day)

- Peter says that with repentance and forgiveness comes a refreshing because of "the presence of the Lord." This presence could be God's manifest presence in a variety of ways, as well as the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Both bring that type of refreshment that we were all talking about it.
- This season of refreshing will culminate with the second coming of Jesus, where God will again "send the Christ" to bring to completion this season of refreshing with His reign. When Jesus returns once again, the time for repentance will be over and all those who've been forgiven will enjoy eternity with Him.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 103)

From Day 5 in the DDG: **If Christians have been forgiven, why do some often feel weighed down instead of refreshed?** (some may continue to live under the condemnation of sin and guilt, not trusting in Christ's forgiveness; some may lack faith and think it seems too easy; we sometimes feel like we need to work for forgiveness; we have strongholds we need to battle to not repeat the cycle of sin and repentance; some addictions need medical or therapeutic help through the work of Christ)

TRANSITION: Everything we do for the Lord, He did first for us. Jesus loved us, served us, helped others, forgave us. As we continue to be Jesus's hands and feet, we are reminded that our strength and power comes from Him. So we point to Jesus in everything we do. And that's how we do everything for His glory and not our own.

MY RESPONSE

SAY: Once the Holy Spirit was given, the disciples began boldly proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit displayed the power of God’s kingdom through the miracles the disciples performed in Jesus’s name for His glory and praise. Because we have experienced the miracle of our salvation from sin and new life in Jesus, we boldly and graciously proclaim the gospel and minister to those in need.

HEAD:

The good news of Jesus reminds us that we were all like the beggar in Acts 3—poor and needy. Jesus came and did more than merely give us blessings in this life, He offered His people forgiveness of sins. Now we are called to be like Jesus and Peter and John in truly seeing others, feeling broken for their sin, and calling them toward spiritual healing through the power of Christ.

What are your thoughts about those who are broken and need Jesus?

HEART:

For us to live with care and concern for those around us, we must feel their burden at a heart level. We can’t merely turn up our nose at them or pass by in pride thinking that we are better. Rather, we should move into the world with humility, counting others as more important than ourselves (Phil. 2:4). Like Peter and John who saw the lame man and pointed him toward Jesus, we too must show humility in the way we approach our daily life.

What pride issues reside in you today?

HANDS:

God’s people show concern for those who are hurting by caring for them and, more importantly, by pointing them to Jesus—who can do more than help their physical bodies by also forgiving their sins. It’s imperative that Christians extend the love of Christ to all people; we must not overlook those whose needs are obvious or those marginalized by society.

Who can you serve this week who are considered marginalized?

PRAY: Father, open my eyes to see people as You do. Give me a heart that is broken by the pain and suffering of people around me. Empower me to find ways to serve others, and as I serve, give me the courage to speak about Jesus.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“Before the church is called to do or say anything, it is called and sent to be the unique community of those who live under the reign of God. The church displays the firstfruits of the forgiven and forgiving people of God who are brought together across the rubble of dividing walls that have crumbled under the weight of the cross. It is the harbinger of the new humanity that lives in genuine community, a form of companionship and wholeness that humanity craves.”²

—Daniel L. Guder

EXTRA

POINT 1: GOD’S PEOPLE SERVE OTHERS TO DISPLAY GOD’S WORKS (ACTS 3:1-7).

+ COMMENTARY

“Then instantly, Dr Luke continues, the man’s feet and ankles became strong (7b)—so strong and agile that he jumped to his feet and began to walk, which he had never done before. Not only so, but he now accompanied the apostles into the temple courts, all the time walking and jumping, and praising God (8). It was an outstanding fulfilment of the Messianic prophecy: ‘Then will the lame leap like a deer.’”³

+ ILLUSTRATION

On a sunny day, a pair of sunglasses is imperative. The sun is so bright that you can’t interact with the world without a filter. The sunglasses help you see the world and move through your day. Glasses are a good illustration for the way we make sense of the world around us. There is great pain, suffering, and brokenness around every corner. People will have to make sense of these realities in some way. Whatever filter, or glasses, they choose to put on will transform the way they act and interact with the world. If they think the issues and solutions are primarily political, then they are seeing the world through political glasses. Everything they experience will be interpreted on the basis of politics. If the issue is one of economics, then they will process life through economic lenses. If, however, the primary issue is human sin and the solution is forgiveness found through Christ, then we will filter our experiences through this lens. Rather than bemoaning the poor among us, we should find ways to attend to their physical and spiritual needs and point them to the One who can deal with their sinful states, as He did with ours.

EXTRA

POINT 2: GOD’S PEOPLE CHALLENGE OTHERS TO RECOGNIZE GOD’S SON (ACTS 3:11-16).

+ COMMENTARY

“Verse 16 explicitly mentions ‘faith’: the man walks because of faith in Jesus. But whose faith—Peter’s or the lame man’s? The answer is both. The initial ‘by faith in his name’ refers to Peter’s faith that Jesus would heal the man, through Peter, in Jesus’ name. Peter goes on to say that ‘the faith that is through Jesus’ has given this man perfect health. We are not given access to the lame man’s thoughts, but, given the way that faith on the part of the healed is noted at times in the Gospels (cf. Matt. 9:28; John 9:35) and in light of the man’s reaction to the disciples after he is healed (cf. the Samaritan leper in Luke 17:11–19), there is reason to see the faith of Peter, John, and the lame man as all being referenced by Peter.”⁴

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

What’s the most amazing thing you’ve ever witnessed? Over the course of life, people witness many amazing moments. Maybe it’s a wedding or the birth of a child. It might be a dramatic sunset or a snow covered mountain. Some may have stumbled upon a moment where the world seemed to stop and beauty was all around. There are even those who have witnessed someone pull through a dark time or a tragic accident when death seemed imminent.

No one living today has witnessed a resurrection, however. This is what Peter claimed had happened in his day. God raised up the Source of life whom the people had killed. And all the disciples were witnesses to this miracle. Those who’ve witnessed far lesser things than resurrections will continually talk about what they’ve seen. How much more should those who witnessed and those who believe God raised up Jesus testify about the things they have seen?

+ ILLUSTRATION

Water is often described as the source of life. People can’t live long without it. This is especially true in harsh climates, such as a desert, where people need extraordinary water intake in order to survive. Peter describes Jesus as the source of life. Like those living in a desert, people inhabit a harsh world that leaves them feeling exhausted. By killing Jesus, they’d cut off the source of life. Jesus is water for the human soul, yet the people chose to kill him. This would be akin to a thirsty traveler in the desert stumbling upon a water source only to pour it out.

POINT 3: GOD’S PEOPLE INVITE OTHERS TO EXPERIENCE GOD’S PRESENCE (ACTS 3:17-20).

+ COMMENTARY

“In the first part of his sermon Peter gave his hearers abundant evidence that Israel had reached the wrong conclusion about Jesus Christ. Then he called on them to repent and reverse their verdict concerning Jesus Christ and place their faith in Him. To help persuade them, he gives them promised results if they repent: God will forgive their sin, the kingdom will come, Messiah will return, judgment will be avoided, and blessing will be realized.”⁵

+ OPTIONAL DISCUSSION

Kids often act in ignorance. They are kids after all. There are so many things that they simply don't know, don't understand, or don't know how to do. We expect this level of immaturity as children progress through these early years of development. When children act in ignorance, a good parent does two things. First, the parent shows mercy. They understand and appreciate that the child has to learn and they don't hold the child accountable for adult levels of maturity. But, they also hold the line. They make it clear to the child that they can't stay in a state of ignorance forever. They point out clear standards and direct the child to obedience. They also press the child to admit wrong and seek forgiveness. In this passage, Peter says the people living in Jesus's day acted in ignorance. Like an adult relating to a child, God was merciful to them in giving them space to repent, and He was intentional about holding them accountable for their sins as well. He gave them space to repent and now was the time.

+ ILLUSTRATION

It happened once, it can happen again. There are certain events that happen that you might never expect, like a team coming back from a huge deficit in the final minutes or a person achieving a Guinness World Record. Even if the event is hard to believe, the fact that it happened once ups the likelihood that it could happen again. Especially if the same people are involved.

For example, if someone is able to perform a world record feat once, then it stands to reason that the same person could do it again. You might not expect any other person to be able to perform at the same level, but surely this person could do it again.

In Acts 3, Peter says that God performed a miracle in sending Christ to the world the first time. Ignorant people killed Him according to God's preordained plan. Those who are forgiven are promised seasons that will culminate in God sending Jesus again. Since God sent Jesus the first time, it would make sense that we should trust Him to send Jesus again. The first coming was marked by a victory over the price of sin, the second coming will be marked by victory over the presence of sin. Jesus will usher in a new world where peace, righteousness, and love will abound forever.

References

1. Chrysostom, quoted in Francis Martin and Evan Smith, eds., *Acts, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 44.
2. Daniel L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 103.
3. John Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World, The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 91.
4. James M. Hamilton Jr. and Brian J. Vickers, *John-Acts*, eds. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, vol. IX, *ESV Expository Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 371.
5. John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts*, vol. 1, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1994), 116.