

THE WAITING COMMENCES

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Jesus's disciples unite in prayer (Acts 1:12-14).
2. Jesus's disciples follow the Scriptures (Acts 1:15-22).
3. Jesus's disciples trust in God (Acts 1:23-26).

Background Passage: Acts 1

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

The disciples chose Matthias to replace Judas in accordance with the Scriptures and God's leading.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

As the disciples waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit, they chose Matthias to replace Judas and join them as witnesses of the resurrection. Belief in the resurrection of Christ is at the center of the gospel and defines all who are disciples of Jesus.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we believe that Jesus has risen from the dead, we unite with all who likewise believe in Jesus and live on mission together declaring the risen Lord.

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: **Have you ever had a waiting experience that was particularly transformative or impactful for you, and if so, what did you learn from that experience?** (waiting to get married; to have children; to hear back from a job interview; to retire; to have grandkids; to find a church; to build lasting friendships)

TRANSITION: No one likes to wait for God to move, but it is often a necessary step for our growth and ability to receive God's blessings. The disciples waited in Jerusalem as Jesus instructed so that they would receive the Holy Spirit and begin the task assigned to them. Even though they waited, they were not idle. We will see how they prepared themselves to discern God's will and effectively carry out Christ's great mission. We too can consider how we should use times of waiting to discover God's will for our lives.

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

- After Jesus explained to the disciples that they would bear witness from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, Jesus ascended to heaven. As the disciples watched where Jesus had gone, two angels appeared and assured them of Christ's return. All of this led to today's text, where we see the disciples obeyed Christ's command to wait as they prepared for the ministry that would follow when the Holy Spirit arrived.



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POINT 1

JESUS'S DISCIPLES UNITE IN PRAYER (ACTS 1:12-14).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 1:12-14** from his or her Bible.

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. **13** And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. **14** All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

EXPLAIN: Refer to **verses 12-13** as you explain the following (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 66):

The disciples stayed in Jerusalem and waited in obedience to Jesus's command, revealing their genuine faith.

- The disciples confidently and expectantly followed Christ's command to wait in Jerusalem as they retraced their steps from the place of His ascension to the upper room, where they would await the coming of the Holy Spirit. Luke 24:52 states that following Christ's ascension, the disciples worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.
- Luke listed the eleven individuals who gathered together to show that all the apostles—except for Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus and died—were faithfully following Christ with one accord.

ASK: (DDG p. 66)

Why is it sometimes hard to be obedient to Jesus? (we get distracted; we want immediate gratification; we are selfish and sinful; we are too busy with our lives; we forget about having an eternal perspective; we try to do things alone without help from other believers)

TRANSITION: Reread **verse 14** and explain that the disciples' dedication and unity in prayer prepared them to be used by God in a powerful way. After Jesus's resurrection, prayer had a whole new meaning because Christ's followers are now a part of the priesthood of all believers.

A SABBATH DAY'S JOURNEY

"A Sabbath day's journey" (Acts 1:12) was a Jewish expression referring to a distance of between $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile. The rabbinic law of the day stipulated that a Sabbath day's journey was not to exceed 2,000 cubits, with a cubit being approximately 22 inches.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Prayer is the key that unlocks all the storehouses of God's infinite grace and power. . . . Prayer can do anything that God can do, and as God can do anything, prayer is omnipotent. No one can stand against the one who knows how to pray and who meets all the conditions of prevailing prayer, and who really prays."¹

—R. A. Torrey (1856–1928)

HIGHLIGHT: To understand this more, read the key doctrine. Use the bulleted points to note how important prayer was for the disciples as they understood that they could now come directly to God (DDG p. 66):

Key Doctrine #82: Priesthood of the Believer: God’s intention for humanity is that we be a kingdom of priests, not just a kingdom with priests. Although God set up the priestly system in the Old Testament due to the sinfulness of humanity and people’s need for a mediator, His ultimate purpose is that we come to God directly, through the mediating work of Jesus Christ, thus eliminating the need of another priest. Because of the work of Christ on the cross, exemplified in the tearing of the curtain that prevented access into the holy of holies, Christians are free to approach God with boldness (Rom. 5:1-5; Heb. 4:14-16).

- Luke noted the first activity of the early church was focused prayer as he highlighted times of corporate prayer throughout the book of Acts (1:24; 8:14-17; 9:11-12; 10:4,9,30; 13:2-3).
- The text states that the disciples “with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer.” This concept reflects a shared heart and mind, not just a shared activity. Unified prayer intertwines the desires and wills of people as they seek God together (see also 2:46; 4:24; 5:12).
- The disciples’ emphasis on prayer reveals three important attributes that focused prayer brings to a group of believers: (1) expectancy as they dedicate themselves together to seek God’s answer; (2) unity as they focus their prayers together on a specific need; and (3) dependency upon God as they submit to God’s ultimate authority.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 66)

From Day 1 in the DDG: **How has praying with others helped you to deepen your sense of connection with God and with your community of believers?** (by knowing I’m not on God’s mission alone; by knowing I have strength from God and with others to live obediently; by helping me see beyond myself and to God’s glory)

CHALLENGE: Stop and take time to implement prayer by sharing prayer requests and praying for each other, or praying over Scripture, using a psalm for example.

TRANSITION: The disciples were obedient to Christ’s command to return to Jerusalem and used the opportunity to be dedicated to prayer while they awaited the Holy Spirit to come. But while they waited, they also sought to be obedient to follow and apply the Scriptures to the life of the community.

POINT 2

JESUS'S DISCIPLES FOLLOW THE SCRIPTURES (ACTS 1:15-22).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 1:15-19** from his or her Bible.

15 In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, **16** “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. **17** For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.” **18** (Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. **19** And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

HIGHLIGHT: Use the text below and **verses 15-19** to highlight (DDG p. 66):

Peter and the disciples understood that Judas’s betrayal and demise was part of the Scriptures being fulfilled because they believed the Scriptures to be true and God-inspired.

- The company of around 120 disciples (v. 15) likely included the 70 disciples commissioned in Luke 10:1-2, the Eleven, the women who followed Jesus (23:49,55), and Jesus’s mother and brothers.² Despite his role as a leader, Peter did not act unilaterally but in conjunction with the other disciples.
- Peter emphasized the divine authorship of the Scriptures, saying “The Scripture had to be fulfilled” (Acts 1:16), which is a common theme throughout the book of Acts (2:16; 3:18,21,25; 4:25; 15:7; 28:25).
- After witnessing the resurrection and Jesus’s appearances for forty days before His ascension, the disciples expressed great confidence in the fulfillment of Scripture and all the teachings that Christ revealed to them.
- The tragedy of Judas’s betrayal is not only that he created a vacancy among the twelve apostles, but also that he—chosen by Jesus and a firsthand witness to His ministry—would betray Jesus with a kiss and buy a field with the blood money.
- *Optional:* Matthew noted in his Gospel that Judas attempted to return the money, hanged himself, and that the priests purchased a field with the money, which became a burial ground for foreigners (Matt. 27:3-10). The apparent discrepancy between the two Gospel accounts should not cause a dilemma. It is likely that the priests purchased the field in Judas’s name, Judas hanged himself secretly so that his body began to decompose until it fell forward and opened upon impact, and the field purchased in Judas’s name was known to the people in association with his betrayal and was used for the burial of foreigners.

ASK: (DDG p. 66)

How does believing the Word of God is true affect how we live? (we will want to obey His commands more; we will worry less; we will live out our salvation and share the good news more; we will trust Him more)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 1:20-22** from his or her Bible.

20 “For it is written in the Book of Psalms, ‘May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it’; and ‘Let another take his office.’

21 So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, **22** beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.”

EXPLAIN: Looking at **verses 20-22**, explain (DDG p. 67):

To continue to fulfill Scripture, the disciples knew they had to choose a replacement for Judas.

- Peter made the following observations from the Psalms concerning Judas: Psalm 69:25 says, “May their camp be a desolation; let no one live in their tents.” And Psalm 109:8 says, “May another take his office.” Peter and the disciples knew that they must take action because God’s Word had instructed them to do so: “one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection” (Acts 1:22).
- Peter’s use of the Psalms to argue for the need to replace Judas marked a new direction in his life. Prior to the resurrection, Peter was often doubtful (Matt. 14:31) and even argumentative (16:22) regarding Christ’s explanation of how God’s Word would be fulfilled. However, after the resurrection, Peter expressed great confidence in the Word of God. His sermons in the book of Acts (2:14-39; 3:11-4:4; 4:8-12; 5:29-32; 10:34-43) were filled with references that prove Jesus is the Christ of Old Testament prophecy and should be received as Savior by faith.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 67)

What are ways we can learn to obey Scripture more on a daily basis? (first we must study Scripture, praying through it; we can memorize Scripture or have it written in plain sight as reminders; we can choose to focus on a certain command each day and try to obey it, then continue with other commands; we can practice obedience)

TRANSITION: Someone needed to replace Judas. The disciples knew what they must do; now they needed to seek God’s leadership in how to do it.

POINT 3

JESUS'S DISCIPLES TRUST IN GOD (ACTS 1:23-26).

INTRODUCE: Some choices we face in life are easy. For instance, when we have to choose between something we know is good or bad for us, we may struggle with giving up the bad option, but we know the alternative is good. However, a more difficult choice arises when we must decide between two good options. This is the dilemma that the disciples faced in replacing Judas.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 1:23-26** from his or her Bible.

23 And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias. **24** And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen **25** to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." **26** And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

RECAP: In verses 21-22, Peter laid out the prerequisites for Judas's replacement to join the eleven apostles: the individual must have been a follower of Jesus throughout His entire ministry, from His baptism to His ascension. Two men met these qualifications: the first was known by three names—Joseph, Barsabbas, and Justus—and the second was Matthias. Both men satisfied the requirements.

HIGHLIGHT: Using **verses 23-25**, highlight the following main idea (DDG p. 67):

When faced with a major decision, the disciples sought God's will in prayer.

- The need to replace Judas with another disciple demonstrated the understanding of the great task that Christ had commissioned the disciples with. The presence of all twelve apostles was necessary to bear the burden of teaching and leading once the Holy Spirit began to exponentially grow the number of disciples through the preaching of the gospel.
- God always provides what He demands, and the dilemma the disciples faced in deciding between the two candidates demonstrates God's provision at work even before we realize our own needs.
- This passage serves as a reminder that there were many more disciples than just the Twelve who followed Jesus throughout His ministry. While some only followed for a short time, there were others who remained faithful to Christ throughout much of His ministry.
- The disciples' prayer was simple yet rich in meaning. They began by acknowledging that God, in His sovereign wisdom, knows "the hearts of all." They then made a specific request, asking God to show which man He had chosen.

ASK: (DDG p. 67)

When making a major decision, what are some helpful tips to help make the right decision? (praying; fasting; consulting other believers; waiting; seeking more knowledge about the situation)

ILLUSTRATE: Bring in a pair of dice and roll them a few times as you ask someone to reread **verse 26**. Ask: “The disciples cast lots in their decision-making. Do you think this is a method we should use today? Why or why not?”

- It is important to remember that the disciples at this time were operating with two disadvantages that we do not have today. First, the Holy Spirit had not yet come to indwell them as He does with all believers today. Second, they did not have the New Testament Scriptures to help guide their decisions as we do. Casting lots to seek God’s will today would be unwise as it was no longer instructed or demonstrated after this passage in the New Testament.

EXPLAIN: Use the bulleted points below to explain **verse 26** and the following statement (DDG p. 67):

After praying, the disciples made sure to act on God’s leading.

- After praying and casting lots, the disciples expressed their trust in the Lord by appointing Matthias, as the lot fell to him, as the twelfth apostle. Although Joseph was an excellent candidate, the disciples recognized and submitted to God’s will as He revealed it to them.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 67)

When in your life have you asked for God’s leading, He answered, but you didn’t want to obey and follow? (be prepared with an answer of your own to start the discussion; some examples may include: God’s leading to leave an incompatible boyfriend/girlfriend; praying for opportunities to share the gospel, receiving some, but not acting on it; decisions to change jobs or homes; God telling you to let go of something)

TRANSITION: While the disciples were called to wait, they were not idle. They used the opportunity to prepare for what God had in store for them next. The waiting period allowed them to become unified in prayer and install God’s chosen replacement for Judas, preparing for their future ministry. Like the disciples, we can rest on the fact that waiting on God’s timing is not a delay, but an opportunity to better prepare ourselves to faithfully accomplish all that He has in store for us.

CASTING LOTS

The practice of casting lots was mentioned seventy times in the Old Testament, although there was no direct command or instruction on how to use it. It is believed to be a cultural practice that God’s people used to seek His will in making decisions. However, this was the only time this practice was mentioned for God’s people in the New Testament since the Holy Spirit guided the church’s decisions after Pentecost.

MY RESPONSE

SAY: As the disciples waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit, they chose Matthias to replace Judas and join them as witnesses of the resurrection. Belief in the resurrection of Christ is at the center of the gospel and defines all who are disciples of Jesus. Because we believe that Jesus has risen from the dead, we unite with all who likewise believe in Jesus and live on mission together declaring the risen Lord.

HEAD:

The disciples' passion for knowing and believing God's Word models how we must trust that the Scriptures are true and reveal God's will to us. As we grow in faith and experience God's faithfulness, we should become increasingly dependent upon Him to fulfill all He has promised in His Word.

How has God proven His Word is true as you have trusted in the Scriptures' promises?

HEART:

It is easy to become frustrated with the Lord when we are waiting for His will to be revealed in our lives. Instead of doubt and frustration, we should seek God in prayer, individually and corporately. In doing so, our hearts will grow in faith and anticipation for God's will to be revealed. Including others in our expectant prayers builds unity and fellowship during times of waiting.

In what areas of your life are you frustrated or doubting what God can do and how can you confess it to Him today?

HANDS:

Genuine faith is demonstrated in a life that prayerfully seeks God's will, looks to know and follow the Scriptures, and acts accordingly because of trust in God as we follow His command to spread the gospel and further His kingdom.

How are you prayerful and active in furthering the church and the kingdom of God?

PRAY: Father, we thank You for revealing Your will to us. In times of difficulty and waiting, may we be reminded of the great privilege we have to gather before You in prayer. May we seek guidance from Your wonderful Word as we seek Your will. Strengthen and protect us as we obediently do all that You have called us to do so that You may be glorified in our lives. Amen.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Faith is a living, unshakeable confidence in God's grace; it is so certain, that someone would die a thousand times for it. This kind of trust in and knowledge of God's grace makes a person joyful, confident, and happy with regard to God and all creatures."³

—Martin Luther
(1483–1546)

EXTRA

POINT 1: JESUS'S DISCIPLES UNITE IN PRAYER (ACTS 1:12-14).

+ COMMENTARY

“Luke also indicates that the men and women were devoted to prayer. This devotion to prayer was an act of obedience to Christ (Luke 18:1). Trusting in the promises of the coming Holy Spirit, the group relied on asking God in prayer to guide their actions. It was because of the disciples’ devotion to prayer that the Lord began to work through them to build his church.”⁴

+ ADDITIONAL TEACHING RESOURCE

We can use the ACTS acrostic as a guide for prayer—Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. Looking at the context of the book of Acts, we can assume that the disciples incorporated these four concepts into their prayers.

- They **adored** God for sending Jesus to them and witnessing His ascension to the right hand of the Father. They experienced God’s grace through the death and resurrection of Christ and eagerly anticipated the coming of the Holy Spirit.
- **Confession** would have been a crucial part of their prayers, given their recent rejection of Jesus and the realization of their own sinfulness. Christ’s willingness to forgive their sins was a significant benefit of their restoration.
- Being in the midst of an incredible number of blessings from God, the disciples would have offered **thanksgiving** in their prayers for the life and ministry of Jesus that they experienced.
- **Supplication**, or asking God for things needed, would have been a frequent part of their prayers as they asked for guidance and wisdom to carry out Christ’s mission, even with the promise of the Holy Spirit.

Using a guide like the ACTS acrostic can be helpful to encourage prayer. Have you found any prayer models or guides that have helped you in your prayer life?

EXTRA

POINT 2: JESUS'S DISCIPLES FOLLOW THE SCRIPTURES

(ACTS 1:15-22).

+ COMMENTARY

“The primary place we can find God’s will is in the pages of the Bible. In his word he has revealed everything necessary for our redemption. That means we don’t have to wonder whether we should be making disciples, praying, living holy lives, bearing fruit, loving people who aren’t lovable, being faithful in our marriages, or caring for orphans. Those things and more are part of his revealed will, in the Bible. We can be confident that pursuing those things is always the right course of action.”⁵

+ ILLUSTRATION

Imagine that you are standing at a crossroads, trying to decide which path to take. As you look down each path, you notice that one is well-lit and clear, while the other is dark and treacherous. As you approach the path that is well-lit and clear, you begin to notice signs along the way that remind you of important lessons from the Scriptures. For example, you may see a sign that says “Love your neighbor as yourself,” “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” or “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” These signs would clearly direct you as to how you are to travel the path. As you walk down the path, you feel a sense of peace and clarity. The well-lit path provides a clear direction and a sense of purpose, and you feel confident that you are on the right track.

On the other hand, if you were to choose the other path, you would be on your own as there is no light to help navigate the way, no wisdom outside of yourself to guide you, and no confidence that the path will lead you the right way. As you walk down the path, you feel a sense of confusion and fear. The darkness makes it difficult to see where you’re going, and you feel unsure of your direction.

Following the well-lit and clear path represents a commitment to living in alignment with the revealed will of God in the Scriptures. It requires a willingness to seek God’s guidance and to follow His commands, even when it is difficult or inconvenient. By doing so, we can experience the peace and clarity that comes from knowing that we are living according to God’s plan. On the other hand, ignoring the Scriptures and choosing to walk down the dark and treacherous path represents a rejection of God’s Word. It leads to confusion, chaos, and ultimately separation from God.

POINT 3: JESUS'S DISCIPLES TRUST IN GOD (ACTS 1:23-26).

+ COMMENTARY

“It is worth noting the cluster of factors which contributed to the discovery of God’s will in this matter. First came the general leading of scripture that the replacement should be made (16-21). Next, they used their common sense that if Judas’s substitute was to have the same Apostolic ministry he must also have the same qualifications, including an eyewitness experience of Jesus and a personal appointment by him. This sound deductive reasoning led to the nomination of Joseph and Matthias. Third, they prayed. For though Jesus had gone, he was still accessible to them by prayer and was recognized as having a knowledge of hearts which they lacked. Finally, they drew lots, by which they trusted Jesus to make his own choice known. Leaving aside this 4th factor, because the spirit has now been given to us, the remaining three (scripture, common sense and prayer) constitute a wholesome combination through which God may be trusted to guide us today.”⁶

+ ILLUSTRATION

Imagine you’re planning a road trip with your friends. You’re all excited to hit the open road and explore new places, but you haven’t decided on a destination yet. You start tossing around ideas and suggestions, but no one can seem to agree on where to go because no one has done any research or looked at guidebooks by experts or those well-traveled.

As the discussion continues, you start to feel anxious and uncertain. You don’t want to make the wrong decision and end up in a disappointing or dangerous situation. You start to doubt your ability to choose a good destination for the trip. This is what it is like when we attempt to live life and make decisions without considering God’s will for us as seen in His Word.

When we seek God through His Word, prayer, and the council of other godly people, and trust in His Spirit to guide us, we can know God’s will for our lives, and we can trust Him fully. We don’t need to worry about making the wrong decisions or taking the wrong path because we know that God is guiding us. This knowledge brings peace and confidence, which allows us to trust God more deeply. This trust allows us to experience the peace and joy that comes from walking in alignment with God’s will.

References

1. Reuben A. Torrey, *The Power of Prayer and the Prayer of Power*, rev. ed. (Abbotsford, WI: Life Sentencing Publishing, Inc., 2020), 7.
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3. Martin Luther, quoted in Michael J. McHugh and John A. Morrison, *Martin Luther: The Great Reformer* (United States: Christian Liberty Press, 2007), 108.
4. R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Acts 1–12 for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, *God’s Word for You* (Epsom, United Kingdom: The Good Book Company, 2018), 16–17.
5. Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 16.
6. John Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 58–59.