

How ACTS still happens TODAY

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7 DAY PLAN | ACTS 1-3



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Introduction

The book of Acts is the exciting story of the advance of God's Kingdom in the early days of the church. The good news of the Gospel had a lasting impact.

Today, the book of Acts is still happening in many places around the world. You can read these inspiring stories in a weekly newsletter called Joel News for which you can sign up here: <https://www.joelnews.org>. This reading plan links stories from Acts in the Bible with similar real stories today.

We welcome your feedback on this reading plan: info@joelnews.org.

Day 1: Jesus' promise

Acts 1:1-11

Jesus promised that after his departure the Holy Spirit would be poured out on his disciples. This would empower them and give them the boldness to witness of Jesus wherever they would go.

Today's story from Joel News:

“Die with Christ, rise with Christ. Holy Spirit, come, set her free and fill her up.” An outdoor baptism forms the dynamic opening scene of a documentary about ordinary disciples of Jesus who have been inspired and activated by the Book of Acts. The film covers a phenomenon that has not been covered much in the mainstream media: thousands of ordinary Christians, without theological training, that go out on the streets, heal the sick, preach the Gospel and baptize people in bathtubs, lakes, rivers and oceans.

We don't see stereotypical street evangelists, trying to convert people by shouting the Gospel at them. Instead, we see non-assuming Christians offering a relaxed and quick prayer for healing. People with various forms of injury and pain seem to receive instant relief. “Pain, go now, in Jesus' name!” they say, immediately followed by the question: “Can you feel any difference?” And the surprising look on people's faces: “Wow. Seriously, it doesn't hurt anymore! I can move it!”

Torben Søndergaard, a Danish evangelist who has been in this ministry for nearly 15 years, explains: “In the Book of Acts we see the early Christians living a lifestyle of discipleship. They were reaching people in their homes and on the streets. They met people right where they were. And the Gospel was exploding and spreading to the entire world. Thousands of people came to faith in Jesus Christ, and were baptised and received the Holy Spirit.”

In Brisbane, Australia, a man gets baptised in water in the city park and begins to speak in tongues. The hundreds of spectators hear the evangelist's words: "This is real. This is real! If you want to read a book about it, we recommend the Bible!" Suddenly some of the gathered bystanders point each other to the blue sky. There an airplane just wrote the words 'real'. Many more convert that day and are baptised on the spot. It could have been a scene from the Book of Acts.

Prayer:

"Come, Holy Spirit. Empower me to be a witness of Jesus wherever you lead me today."

Day 2: Fervent united prayer

Acts 1:12-14

Jesus' disciples gathered in an upper room, where they gave themselves to continuous prayer.

Today's story from Joel News:

Almost every significant move of God in history was preceded by fervent, united prayer. This inspired Christians in Whatcom county on the north-west coast of the United States to establish a 'canopy of day and night prayer' over their region. This Light of the World Prayer Center gathered Christians from all kinds of backgrounds and churches. Soon pastors joined in for a monthly meeting to build spiritual friendships and seek God for the county.

"This is an unbelievable blessing," says Grant Fishbook, pastor of Christ the King. "Trust has been built over time as the message sunk in that we're not each other's competition. Our competitor is the devil, but we are family and on the same team. We love each other and want to live that out. Now the pastors text and call each other for encouragement and drink coffee together, because there's a genuine interest in what's happening with each part of the family. They ask: How are you doing, how can I pray, how can I support you?"

Alvin Vandergriend, church prayer coordinator of the 3rd Christian Reformed Church, agrees. "A canopy of prayer is a covering of God's providential blessing over a territory. Prayer is where we access God's resource and heart, where he empowers us to fulfil his mission. For all the years I've been involved in ministry, I've never seen pastors come together like now in Whatcom county. The unity is quite amazing."

In Whatcom county 80 pastors out of a hundred are now praying consistently together. This includes the native, Hispanic and Korean

churches, it's a truly multi-cultural expression of the Body of Christ. Pastors have also been sharing their pulpits and holding joint community services with thousands of people coming together.

The unity also led to an explosion of church plants - 80 church plants in a decade - with 10,000 first-time salvations of people who were baptised in water. This is a phenomenal church growth in what has historically been one of the least church areas in the US.

Application:

Meet or call a Christian friend today and pray in unity for your city or region.

Day 3: The outpouring of the Holy Spirit

Acts 2:1-13

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured out on Jesus' disciples in an impacting way. There was a manifestation of wind and fire. To their surprise the disciples started speaking in tongues, new languages they didn't know.

Today's story from Joel News:

It was in February 1967 that the Holy Spirit fell on a group of Catholic students from Pittsburgh's Duquesne University. They were on a spiritual weekend retreat, seeking God to deepen their faith.

One of these students, David Mangan, wondered if the Holy Spirit could still bring tongues and power like dynamite. He decided to ask the Lord for it because his Christianity felt powerless and pedestrian. "My spiritual life was limping along. The way I describe it, it was like I was pushing a car uphill."

As he sought the Lord alone that weekend in a chapel located on the upper floor of the retreat center, David received a powerful answer. "The presence of God was so thick, so powerful, you could cut it with a knife. It's the most intense experience I've ever had in my life. Time meant nothing to me. I had no idea if it was two minutes or two hours; it made no difference. I was lost in Christ, and happy to be so."

"There were all these electrical explosions going on in my body," he described. Then he began to speak in tongues. The overwhelming feeling caused him to run and ask the retreat leaders if it was really possible. They said it is a valid experience which happened throughout history to a lot of saints. The experience infused him with a new dynamism and power in his spiritual life - or as he puts it, "It was like

somebody told me that the car I'd been pushing uphill had a motor and now I had the key.”

Shortly thereafter, Patty Mansfield had her own Holy Spirit encounter as she was in the same chapel and God's Presence came upon her. “As I knelt, I actually began to tremble with this sense of, ‘My gosh, this is God and He's holy!’” she said. Patty soon found herself prostrate, flat on her face. “And as I was lying there, I felt immersed in the love of God. I realised that if I could experience the love, the goodness, the sweetness, the mercy of God like that, anyone could.”

Soon the other students were drawn to the chapel and one after the other received an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. A heavenly Presence filled the chapel which they now called the Upper Room based on the place where the Holy Spirit fell in the Book of Acts. “As we were kneeling, some were weeping, others were laughing for joy. Again others, like myself, felt like our bodies were on fire. My hands and my arms were tingling,” Patty said.

When David started praising God, it didn't come out in English. A student of French who was sitting next to him said: “David, I didn't know you spoke French.” He said: “Oh, I don't speak French. I only studied Latin and German.” She told him he was praising God for streams of living water. Later, seeking confirmation, David visited a linguist, who asked the young man to pray in tongues again. He exclaimed: “You're now praying in Arabic!” David was astounded. “I had no idea.”

Question:

Do you long for a deeper experience of the Holy Spirit in your life? You can ask God for it today.

Day 4: Dreams and visions

Acts 2:14-21

Peter explains to the crowd that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all people at Pentecost was the fulfilment of a prophecy in Joel. One of the signs of this are dreams and visions, and people getting saved.

Today's story from Joel News:

Almost 25% of Muslims that come to Jesus encounter Him through dreams and visions. Often these dreams and visions come to them when they seek God intensively, but don't have a knowledge of the gospel or contact with Christians. These supernatural occurrences happen all over the Islamic world. Muslims experience these dreams with such intense reality, that they surrender their heart and mind to Jesus in the wake of the dream.

Take Khalil, a radical Egyptian terrorist, changed from a murderous 'Saul' to a forgiving 'Paul'. He set out to discredit the Bible but could not; and although he despised Christians and Jews, his heart was changed forever when the Savior appeared to him in a dream that penetrated his soul.

Khosrow, a teenager in Iran, despaired of life itself. That is, until he experienced a vision of Jesus Christ. In the vision, Jesus extended his hand toward Khosrow, inviting him to take hold and promising him that his "life would change forever." Khosrow took Jesus' hand and, as he describes it, "waves of electricity flowed through my body over and over again. I wept for the first time since I was a child and joy filled my heart."

As a teenager Dini in Indonesia felt let down by family, friends and society, but yearned to know God. On the night of Lailatur Qodar, when Muslims around the world make individualised prayers to Allah, Dini

experienced a vision of Jesus Christ, who appeared before her and told her to follow him. Dini was hesitant, but overcame her fear and committed her life to Jesus that same night. Peace filled her heart, even as persecution began.

Mohammed in northern Nigeria did not have just one dream of Jesus Christ - he had seven! Son of a prominent Fulani herdsman, Mohammed had studied the Qur'an in depth at several Muslim schools and was preparing to leave for advanced studies in Saudi Arabia when he experienced the series of dreams that convinced him of the deep love and lordship of Jesus Christ. Although his father tried to kill him in the wake of his conversion, Mohammed survived the various attempts on his life and persevered in his Christian walk, eventually leading his father to faith in Christ.

Praise:

Thank God today for the outpouring of his Holy Spirit on all people. Thank him that so many Muslims find Jesus through dreams and visions.

Day 5: A large harvest

Acts 2:37-42

After Peter explains to the people that Jesus is the predicted Messiah, rose from the dead and poured out his Spirit, many are deeply touched. When asked what to do Peter tells them to turn from their old lives and be baptised. That day 3,000 people start following Jesus and form the first church.

Today's story from Joel News:

A record-breaking 97,344 people accepted Christ in baptism during a two-week evangelistic outreach by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Rwanda in May 2016. The baptisms took place at 2,227 sites across the African country.

Local church leaders credited the Holy Spirit and Total Member Involvement for the unprecedented number of baptisms. "When each member is involved, there will be a big harvest," said Sophonie Setako, president of the church's North-West Rwanda Field. Total Member Involvement is the name of an initiative that encourages each church member to find ways to share Jesus with friends and communities.

In Rwanda, the 720,000 members took Total Member Involvement to heart. Many studied the Bible with neighbours and went door-to-door, inviting people to the evangelistic meetings. Members also donated money for food, cows, and health insurance policies aimed at improving the lives of impoverished people in their communities. Medical clinics at three locations provided free services to nearly 6,000 people over the course of a week.

Thousands of people packed the sandy shore of Lake Kivu to witness the baptisms. The elderly and disabled were baptised first, followed by pregnant women and long lines of men and women. Eight pastors

baptised 1,971 people in about 2 ½ hours. People emerging from the lake couldn't have been happier. Wide smiles filled many faces as they exited the water and made their way to white tents, where they changed out of their water-soaked baptismal robes.

Application:

Jesus said that the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. What is your own place as a worker in God's harvest field? Write this down today and put the note on a visible place. It is a daily reminder to ask God to empower you to be a worker in his harvest.

Day 6: A real community

Acts 2:43-47

The first church was marked by the fact that the Christians had everything in common. There was no need among them.

Today's story from Joel News:

Many people in today's fast-paced world have, for any amount of reasons, become social outsiders, pariahs, outlaws. For this group Timothy and Monica Chang started a community in Jongli, a town in Taiwan.

God led Timothy to lay down his position as a pastor of one of the largest evangelical churches in the nation, and open the doors of his home to have a new family. In Jongli he met the poor, the despised and rejected, and with these people he formed a community called Hebron.

Today, the community of 200 is made up of poor people, mentally unstable, youth at risk, people who recently have come out of jail, but also rich people who decided to turn their lives around. The people of the Hebron community opened their hearts and their homes to those who are at the end of their rope.

The people in Hebron learn to own their failures and limitations. They are taught that we redeem our weakness by embracing them as part of ourselves. And as they experience how Jesus embraces them, they start embracing Him. The sense of attraction that this 'family' creates on those that watch from the outside is quite magnetic.

Since Hebron began, others have followed Timothy's example and more and more creative communities have started and are meeting needs of people that regular churches would never touch. So far, 13

new communities have sprung up and Timothy's goal is to see 100 communities established in Taiwan.

'Son of Man' is another one of these communities. They are located in the hills outside Taichung. They are a self-contained people who raise their own animals, grow their own food and are housed in yurts (Mongolian tents) made entirely of recyclable materials. They invite anyone who is not able to cope with life to join them and allow them to see another possibility, another way to function and share life. They communicate their ethos through poetry, writings, and beautiful music. 'Son of Man' is truly a place where people can learn to live again.

Application:

Ask God today to open your eyes for a person in need and really meet that need.

Day 7: The first healing miracle

Acts 3:1-10

When Peter heals a crippled beggar this amazes the whole community.

Today's story from Joel News:

In Nepal, a majority Hindu country in the Himalayas, the government tries to hinder the growth of the church. But without success - the church grows strongly, often with miracles. Take the story of 18 year old Tilak, a deaf-mute teenager.

One day Pastor Biju, a church planter affiliated with The Timothy Initiative, stopped to pray with him. As the pastor prayed for deliverance and healing he witnessed a bewildered look on Tilak's face. Something amazing happened to the deaf-mute boy. Tears streamed down his face, as he discovered that he could hear and speak for the first time in his life. A miraculous healing had just taken place.

Tilak rushed to his mother, who heaved sobs of joy and relief. Her boy was healed, and it was all because of Jesus. The entire family surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ that day.

Tilak and his family became eager to learn more about God, so they began attending the very first church planted among their people. Now Tilak's voice was able to join others in worship. As he listened to the teachings of Jesus, he was awed by the miracle that he could hear and understand what was shared.

Then a third miracle happened in Tilak's life. When he opened God's Word, he instantly was able to read, without any prior instruction. The symbols on the pages of Scripture came alive and he was given his own Bible to take home.

Tilak, the boy who could not read, is now studying the Word of God.

Tilak, the boy who could not hear, is listening to teachings and growing in his faith.

Tilak, the boy who could not talk, is now proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ among those who have never heard.

Prayer:

“Jesus, make me an instrument of your healing today.”

There is more!

We hope this reading plan encouraged you. Would you like to read more inspiring stories on the advance of God's Kingdom around the globe today? Sign up for the weekly edition of Joel News: <https://www.joelnews.org>.