

You Will Be My Witnesses

February 5, 2023

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Acts 1:1-8

Session Outline

1. Final Moments (Acts 1:1-3)
2. Final Instructions (Acts 1:4-5)
3. Final Promise (Acts 1:6-8)

Theological Theme

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He gave final instructions to His followers. He also promised them that the Holy Spirit would give them all the power necessary to be witnesses for Him to all people.



Leader Guide

You Will Be My Witnesses

Introduction

Final words are a big deal. Think about the last words a military leader gives before a battle like the words Eisenhower shared with the Allied troops just before D-Day. Often, we see clips of the last words a coach tells his team before they take the field or court to fight for victory and are inspired ourselves. We can all remember some last words a loved one shared before passing. Any time we know we only have a few moments left with a loved one, we tend to cling to what they say or do.

Final words and thoughts carry more weight because we know they are the last we will hear from that person before a battle, game, or even death. We take note of those words and use them as motivation for how we approach an event or live out our lives.

- ❓ What are some final words from a coach, leader, or loved one that stand out to you?
- ❓ Why would you say final words carry more weight?

Session Summary


After the resurrection, Jesus spent forty days with His followers preparing them for what was coming. He taught them and gave instructions on what their assignment was to be. He promised them the coming of the Holy Spirit and taught what it means to live as His disciples.

Jesus stressed that the Holy Spirit is the key to a powerful life. They were told to wait for the coming of the Spirit, and they received the promise of the Father that the Holy Spirit would enable them to live in His power as they fulfilled the instructions of their Savior. In His final charge to them, Jesus told His followers to be His witnesses in every place they traveled and to every person they encountered.


1. Final Moments (Acts 1:1-3)

Acts opens with an introduction to the purpose of the book and the author. The book of Acts was written by Luke. He referenced continuing his writings about the life and ministry of Jesus that began with his Gospel account. This book describes Jesus's ministry continued after the events in the Gospels—a ministry that still works in the church today. Acts does not encompass all that the early church did to grow, but it does describe how the gospel spread from Jerusalem to Rome.

Jesus knew time was short, and He sought to give last instructions to His disciples. These are the last few moments they had together, and what happened was significant. Jesus is the ultimate teacher, and He is always the perfect example for us to follow. Note that even in His last instructions, Jesus modeled how we are supposed to live out our lives. Though He had all the power of His deity available to Him, Jesus chose to demonstrate what it means to trust the Holy Spirit for power. He gave His commands to the disciples through the Holy Spirit. If Jesus, who is God, chose to surrender to the Holy Spirit, then how much more do we as fallible humans who are limited in our own strength need to do the same?

 Why is it significant that the text tells us Jesus gave instructions “through the Holy Spirit” in His final moments?


Think about the impact of how Jesus related to the Holy Spirit. As the third member of the Trinity, the Spirit was the least known at the time. The people were familiar with God the Father. They had learned about and grown close to Jesus the Son. But this third member was not yet known to them. Though we know the Spirit had been working throughout history to that point, He had not been sent to reside in believers yet, so He had not been a permanent part of Christ's followers' lives.

 Why might trusting the Holy Spirit be tough for those early believers? In John 16:7, Jesus said it was to the disciples benefit that He would go away, and the Spirit would come.

Is it tough for you to trust the Holy Spirit?


Jesus knew wouldn't be easy for the disciples to carry out His instructions and commands. They needed power to obey and carry out His mission. This was the role the Holy Spirit would play in their lives. Jesus also modeled what it was like to carry out His mission through the power of the Spirit instead of relying on His own strength.

Luke referred to another aspect of Jesus's mission during these last days—to verify that He had been resurrected. Death was defeated, and He is alive. Jesus's presence proved everything was accomplished just as He had told them, and they could rely on the truth of the resurrection forever. Jesus showed He was exactly who He claimed to be and was worthy of their trust and following.


 **Discuss:** Where do you need to trust in the Holy Spirit's power instead of your own strength?

2. Final Instructions (Acts 1:4-5)

Jesus told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father—the Holy Spirit. Imagine how that instruction might have been more difficult than being told to travel around teaching and preaching. Sometimes waiting is the hardest thing for us to do, but when the instruction to wait comes from the Lord, we can be assured that the waiting will be worth it and disobedience is foolish.

 **Recall a time when you felt like God was clearly calling you to wait.** What made this difficult?


Christ-followers can accomplish nothing for the kingdom of God if we are not willing to wait for the Holy Spirit to empower and guide us. Jesus knew the disciples were men of action. They were committed followers who had been a major part of His ministry for the last three years, and yet they needed the Holy Spirit if they wanted to accomplish His mission on earth. How often do we need that same reminder? We can easily get caught up in our own plans, our own strength, and our own skills and rush off to do God's work without waiting on the Holy Spirit. The lesson for us is the same as the disciples. Wait on the Holy Spirit and trust Him to provide the power we need to fulfill God's call on our lives every day.

 **Share an experience you've had of the power of the Holy Spirit when you've been faithful to wait as God instructs.**

These followers of Jesus were likely ready to get going but being told to wait carries some implications about what you're waiting for. You wait for something good and valuable. The Holy Spirit is way more than that. You also wait for something you need to receive because you can't create it yourself. It is about God and not you. Waiting can be a test to grow your faith. You learn to trust what God wants to do in you as much as what He wants to do through you. Instead of complaining about the wait, we can look to what God is doing to prepare us for His work in the future.


When Jesus spoke of God the Father and promised the arrival of the Holy Spirit, we see the entirety of the Trinity together. This promise pointed to each person of the Trinity and their distinct roles. The promise of the Father ensured the coming, filling, and empowering of the Spirit. God is good and trustworthy and always keeps His promises, so we can wait with eager expectation for those promises to be fulfilled.

While instructing His followers to wait for the Holy Spirit, Jesus also said they need to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. When a person is baptized, he or she is immersed or covered in water, symbolizing new life. To be baptized in the Spirit means we need to be immersed in the Holy Spirit completely. Followers of Jesus are baptized in the Holy Spirit the moment they place their trust in Jesus. This instruction was not primarily about taking the Holy Spirit with them on their travels but about being surrendered to the Holy Spirit so that He alone had control.

 Application: Where do you need to further surrender to the Holy Spirit?

3. Final Promise (Acts 1:6-8)

The disciples came together with Jesus for the last time they would see Him in person on earth. Nothing in the Scriptures tells us that they knew this was their final moment with their Savior and friend. They did ask a question that may indicate they suspected their time with Him was almost through. Their weighty question about the restoration of Israel had been asked before, but now it took on new significance because Jesus had instituted the New Covenant and this restoration was part of that covenant. Jesus responded that they were not to know the exact details but to keep trusting.

 What is a big question you want to ask Jesus? What can you take away from Jesus's response to the disciples in this instance?

It is good that the entire plan for the world is not laid out for all to know. God the Father has established the timeline, and it is His to know and control. Though we tend to get caught up in a desire to know the details of what is coming, there is beauty and freedom in trusting that God holds everything together and that we are called to continue living in faith and the power of the Spirit just as He instructed.

You Will Be My Witnesses

The disciples wondered if Jesus' resurrection heralded the immediate coming of God's kingdom. They asked Him in rather narrow nationalistic terms if God was getting ready to "restore the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus rejected both their concern for determining the date and their Jewish exclusivism. He replaced both concerns with a worldwide mission. When the kingdom comes is not our concern. What we do until it comes is: we are to be His witnesses. The witness is to be worldwide.

Jesus reiterated that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came on them. The most important thing wasn't the disciples full understanding but Jesus's clear instruction and promise. All who place their faith in Jesus receive the same promised Spirit as the first followers of Christ.

Once the power arrived, the mission would start. The disciples were told to be witnesses in all the world. That was to be the result of the Holy Spirit's arrival and indwelling. Once He arrived, they would be witnesses—other people would see the power and the difference He made in their lives. Jesus didn't encourage them to be witnesses, He declared that they would be. The same is true for us today. We are all witnesses for something. The question is who or what will that be for?

If we want to be effective witnesses for God, we must be filled with the Holy Spirit. The best evangelism is not from a plan, program, or class; it comes from the power of the Spirit at work in our lives. That doesn't mean Christ-followers don't use a plan or program to explain what faith means; it means the way you live is what speaks the loudest to other people. The progression of where the disciples were to be witnesses then became the outline of the rest of the book of Acts. God sent His witnesses to all the places on earth, and the Holy Spirit would empower them in this quest just as He empowers us to be witnesses wherever we go.

Brentwood Baptist challenges each group to help send a representative on a mission experience every 2 years. Review the poster in your classroom or attached to this document.



Ask your group to prayerfully consider how the Holy Spirit is leading you to participate:

- Go
- Collect Supplies
- Support financially
- Offer daily prayer support
- Other

Prayer of Response

Praise the Lord for His good plans. Thank Him for the gift of the Holy Spirit and ask the Spirit to fill you up so that you can be an effective witness for Him.

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in Acts* by Tony Merida
- *Be Dynamic* by Warren Wiersbe
- *Forgotten God* by Francis Chan and Danae Yankoski

For information on Missions, visit: brentwood.church/missions

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Gospel Conversations mean sharing the good news of Jesus with the lost and searching, trusting the Holy Spirit with the results.

Groups are ongoing biblical communities that grow, care, and equip.

Going means service to one's campus, neighbors, and the nations to imitate Jesus' love for believers and for those yet to believe.

Gather means believers assembling together (at least) weekly to worship God through singing, preaching, and encouraging one another to good works.

Questions to Guide Your Group's Discussion

1. What does this passage say?
2. What did this passage mean to its original audience?
3. What does this passage tell us about God?
4. What does this passage tell us about man?
5. What does this passage demand of me?
6. How does this passage change the way I relate to people? (*How can you use this information this week at work or with friends and neighbors?*)
7. How does this passage prompt me to pray to God?

*Adapted from Seven Arrows by Matt Rogers pastor of The Church at Cherrydale, Greenville, SC

DxD This Week

Call to Action

How can you be Jesus's witness where you live, work, study, play, and worship?

For Next Week

Session Title

- United in Prayer

Main Passages

- Acts 1:12-14; Luke 11:1-4

Session Outline

1. United in Prayer (Acts 1:12-14)
2. Powerful Prayer (Luke 11:1)
3. Model Prayer (Luke 11:2-4)

Memorize

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” - Acts 1:8

Historical Context of Acts

Purpose

The book of Acts emphasizes the work of God through the Holy Spirit in the lives of people who devoted themselves to Jesus Christ, especially Paul as he led the Gentile missionary endeavor. It is no exaggeration to say that the Christian church was built through the dynamic power of the Spirit working through chosen vessels. Another important concept is the radial spread of the gospel from Jews to Gentiles, from Jerusalem to Judea, from Samaria and on to the rest of the world (1:8). Thus Christianity transformed from being a sect within Judaism to a world religion that eventually gained acceptance everywhere, even in the heart of the pagan Roman Empire: Rome itself.

Author

The book of Acts is formally anonymous. The traditional view is that the author was the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke—Luke the physician and traveling companion of Paul (Col 4:14; 2Tm 4:11; Phm 24). As early as the second century AD, church leaders such as Irenaeus wrote that Luke was the author of Acts. Irenaeus based his view on the “we” passages in Acts, five sections where the author changes from the third person (“he/she” and “they”) to first-person plural (“we”) as he narrates the action (16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–29; 28:1–16). Irenaeus and many scholars since his time have interpreted these passages to mean that the author of Acts was one of the eyewitness companions of Paul. Luke fits this description better than any other candidate, especially given the similar themes between the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.

Setting

The date of composition of the book of Acts is to a large extent directly tied to the issue of authorship. A number of scholars have argued that Acts should be dated to the early 60s (at the time of Paul’s imprisonment). Acts closes with Paul still in prison in Rome (28:30–31). Although it is possible that Luke wrote at a later date, a time when Paul had been released, it is more plausible to think that he completed this book while Paul was still in prison. Otherwise he would have ended the book by telling about Paul’s release.

Special Features

The book of Acts provides a glimpse into the first three decades of the early church (ca AD 30–63) as it spread and multiplied after the ascension of Jesus Christ. It is not a detailed or comprehensive history. Rather, it focuses on the role played by apostles such as Peter, who ministered primarily to Jews, and Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.

Extended Commentary

Acts 1:1-8

1:1 The preface links the book of Acts explicitly with the first narrative, the Gospel of Luke (Lk 1:1–4). Though the books are separate in the NT canonical order, both were probably written by Luke, the traveling companion of Paul. The books are both large enough to fill a complete scroll, and so it is unlikely that they were ever joined as a single book. The book of Acts was written after the Gospel of Luke, as is indicated by the preface (1:1; cp. Lk 1:1–4). Luke builds these companion narratives on a broad chronology that begins with the birth of Jesus, then extends through his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. He next shows the expansion of the church from Jerusalem to Rome. Acts closes with Paul awaiting trial in Rome. Like the first volume, the second is addressed to a person named Theophilus. Some speculate that Theophilus (Gk, “lover of God”) was a literary figure representing Christians generally, but more likely he was an actual historical person. Some think on the basis of Lk 1:1–4 that Theophilus was a seeker after God and Luke aimed to explain Christianity to him. Others think Theophilus was a recent convert who required instruction in his newfound faith. Still others suggest he was an early church leader for whom Luke provided a summary of events surrounding the rise of Christianity. In any of the above scenarios, it is possible that Theophilus was Luke’s patron, financing the publication of Luke and Acts. Though only a maximum of twenty percent of urban men were literate, there was a distinct book culture in the ancient world. Publication involved hand copying an original document to make it available for others. The cost of materials for the initial document plus all subsequent drafts could be expensive, with each copy costing up to four days’ wages. As a result, the patronage system was an important factor in making book publication possible in the ancient world.

1:2–3 Luke opened Acts by mentioning the Gospel of Luke, the narrative of Jesus’s life and ministry up until his ascension. Before his ascension, Jesus suffered the agony of death and then presented himself alive to his disciples (Lk 24). Jesus presented himself by many convincing proofs, including appearing to the disciples during the forty days between his resurrection and ascension. During this time Jesus instructed them about the kingdom of God.

1:4 The Father’s promise refers to the gift of the Holy Spirit, which would soon come (chap. 2).

1:5 John’s baptism was a symbolic washing to purify and to indicate repentance of sin. Jesus’s baptism of believers would be of greater impact and involved the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

1:6–7 Restoration of the kingdom of Israel was something for which all first-century Jews longed. It was commonly believed that Messiah, son of David and heir to his throne, would accomplish this restoration. Jesus deflected the disciples’ misguided question and repeated his command that they were to be his witnesses near and far (cp. Mt 28:19).

1:8 The major focus of the book of Acts is stated in this verse. Jesus said believers would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them, empowering them to be his witnesses in Jerusalem first and then spreading to the end of the earth. Note three things about how this unfolds. First, the empowering presence is to be the Holy Spirit, not Jesus himself. Jesus prepared his disciples

for the transition when the Holy Spirit would come to be a constant presence in his bodily absence (see Jn 14:16–17). Second, the growth of the church would come about through the witness of the disciples. From the beginning, the church is depicted as a community that actively witnesses to their faith in Jesus Christ. Third, the result of this witness will be measurable, geographical growth. This growth will begin in Jerusalem and then spread through ever-widening concentric circles to other Jewish areas (e.g., Judea), to areas on the edges of Judaism (e.g., Samaria), and eventually to “the end of the earth,” which may refer to the known world of that time, likely coextensive with the reach of the Roman Empire. As new lands and peoples were discovered in coming centuries, the church understood that it must keep expanding its witness to reach the newfound “end of the earth.”¹

References

1. *CSB Study Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).

Author Bio

Tony Merida (Exalting Jesus in Acts)

Tony Merida is lead pastor of Imago Dei Church in Raleigh, NC, and associate professor of preaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC.

Warren Wiersbe (Be Dynamic)

Warren W. Wiersbe, former pastor of the Moody Church and general director of Back to the Bible, has traveled widely as a Bible teacher and conference speaker. Because of his encouragement to those in ministry, Dr. Wiersbe is often referred to as “the pastor’s pastor.” He has ministered in churches and conferences throughout the United States as well as in Canada, Central and South America, and Europe. Dr. Wiersbe has written over 150 books, including the popular BE series of commentaries on every book of the Bible, which has sold more than four million copies. At the 2002 Christian Booksellers Convention, he was awarded the Gold Medallion Lifetime Achievement Award by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. Dr. Wiersbe and his wife, Betty, live in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Francis Chan (Forgotten God)

Francis Chan is the best-selling author of *Crazy Love*, *Forgotten God*, *Erasing Hell*, *You and Me Forever* and the host of the BASIC.series (*Who Is God & We Are Church*). Currently, Francis is planting churches in the San Francisco area and recently launched a countrywide discipleship movement called *Multiply with David Platt*.

Danae Yankoski (Forgotten God)

Mike and Danae Yankoski live in the Pacific Northwest with their dog, Elliott. Their passions include backpacking, hiking, running, tea, growing veggies, good books, and substantive conversation. Mike is the author of *Under the Overpass* and Danae is the co-author with Francis Chan of *Crazy Love* and *The Forgotten God*.