

# *The Acts of the Apostles*



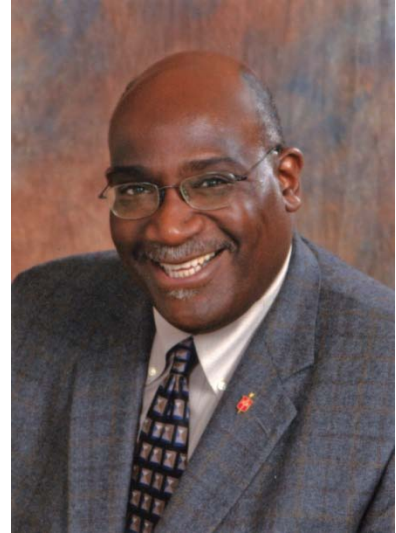
*Hearts Afire and the Four Areas of Focus*

*Daily Readings*

## A Message from the Bishop

Dear Friends,

Welcome to a wonderful adventure in bible study and faith formation. Thank you for taking this particular leap. It is my prayer and hope that you and those you share this study with will grow in faith and witness to the presence and power of the Risen Christ. I am grateful to those who invested themselves in preparing this study. They have given many hours and much creativity. The Communications Office of the conference has created a number opportunities to share your experiences related to the study. Please be alert to these opportunities and join the conversation.



Once again welcome and thank you. Enjoy.

Your servant in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gregory V. Palmer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Gregory V. Palmer

## Lesson 1, Day 1

### **Read: Acts 2:5-12**

<sup>5</sup>Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup>And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. <sup>7</sup>Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?” <sup>8</sup>And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? <sup>9</sup>Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup>Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” <sup>12</sup>All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” (NRSV)

**Questions for reflection:** Have you ever been amazed and perplexed by something the Holy Spirit has done? If so, why do you think you were amazed?

**Prayer suggestion:** Pray for those who have yet to hear the Gospel in their own language.

**Notes:**

## Lesson 1, Day 2

### **Read: Acts 10:15**

The voice said to him again, a second time, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.” (NRSV)

**Questions for reflection:** Has the Holy Spirit ever convicted you of a similar sin? In what ways have you put yourself in the place of God?

### **Read: Acts 10: 34-35**

<sup>34</sup>Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, <sup>35</sup>but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. (NRSV)

**Questions for reflection:** Have there been times in your life in which you believed that God showed partiality? When was it? In what way(s) do you think the Holy Spirit was involved that enabled Peter to say this?

**Prayer suggestion:** Pray that God may expand your perspective beyond your own narrowness of thought and times when you may be too judgmental.

**Notes:**

## Lesson 1, Day 3

**Read: Acts 10:42-43**

<sup>42</sup>He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup>All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” (NRSV)

**Question for reflection:** Is there something the Holy Spirit has been urging you to do that you have ignored?

**Prayer suggestion:** Pray that God may give you a willing spirit to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in your life.

**Notes:**

## Lesson 1, Day 4

### **Read: Acts 2:37-39**

<sup>37</sup>Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” <sup>38</sup>Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup>For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” (NRSV)

**Questions for reflection:** Is there something you need to confess in order to move forward in your faith? Do you know how the Holy Spirit has gifted you for ministry?

**Prayer suggestion:** Confess to God the barriers you see in your faith and ask for God to help you overcome them. Ask also that God may reveal to you any hidden barriers that may be slowing your growth in the faith.

**Notes:**

## Lesson 1, Day 5

**Read: Acts 2:41**

So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. (NRSV)

**Questions for reflection:** Do you believe that God loves you and Jesus came to bring forgiveness of sins? What role do you think the Holy Spirit played in adding three thousand to their number? What role do you think the Holy Spirit plays in your faith?

**Prayer suggestion:** Praise God for God's never failing love and compassion.

**Notes:**

## Lesson 1, Day 6

### **Read: Acts 10:44-48**

<sup>44</sup>While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. <sup>45</sup>The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, <sup>46</sup>for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, <sup>47</sup>“Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” <sup>48</sup>So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days. (NRSV)

**Questions for reflection:** In what ways has your church not shown hospitality to the stranger? In what ways did Peter challenge the faithful? What example did Peter set in the text?

**Prayer suggestion:** Pray that your church would be more open to strangers and more willing to serve others rather than themselves.

**Notes:**

## Lesson 2, Day 1: A Holy Person

**Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord. Abide in Him always, and feed on His word. Make friends of God's children, help those who are weak, Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek.**

*-United Methodist Hymnal/William Longstaff, 1882*

### **Read: Acts 12:1-2**

<sup>1</sup> In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. <sup>2</sup>He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God. (NRSV)

### **Questions for reflection:**

This scripture suggests that Cornelius was a holy man.

What would be your description of a holy person?

What does being a holy person have to do with leadership?

What is one thing you would like to do to become more holy?

### **Closing prayer:**

Take time to be holy, be calm in thy soul, Each thought and each motive beneath His control.

Thus led by His Spirit to fountains of love, Thou soon shalt be fitted for service above.

*-United Methodist Hymnal/Words: William Longstaff, 1882*

### **Notes:**

## Lesson 2, Day 2: Recognizing a Leader

**”Leaders must be close enough to relate to others, but far enough ahead to motivate them.”**

- *John Maxwell*

**Read: Acts 4:13-14**

<sup>13</sup>Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognized them as companions of Jesus. <sup>14</sup>When they saw the man who had been cured standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. (NRSV)

**Question for reflection:** In these verses, we sense that Peter and John were recognized as leaders, even though they were not trained as such. What set Peter and John apart and caused them to be seen as leaders?

**Closing prayer:**

Make us worthy, Lord, to serve our fellow men throughout the world who live and die in poverty and hunger. Give them through our hands this day their daily bread, and by our understanding love, give peace and joy. –*Mother Teresa*

**Notes:**

## Lesson 2, Day 3: The Leader's Role

**“A leader takes people where they want to go. A great leader takes people where they don't necessarily want to go, but ought to be.” - Rosalynn Carter**

### **First reading: Acts 16:11-15, 40**

<sup>11</sup>We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, <sup>12</sup>and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. <sup>13</sup>On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. <sup>14</sup>A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. <sup>15</sup>When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.” And she prevailed upon us.

<sup>40</sup>After leaving the prison they went to Lydia's home; and when they had seen and encouraged the brothers and sisters there, they departed. (NRSV)

**Question for Reflection:** What was Lydia's role in leadership according to these verses?

### **Second reading: Acts 12:12**

<sup>12</sup>As soon as he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many had gathered and were praying. (NRSV)

**Question for reflection:** Why Mary's house? Why were many gathered at Mary's house praying?

### **Closing Prayer:**

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love; for it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

--St Francis of Assisi, 13th Century

### **Notes:**

## Lesson 2, Day 4: Advocacy in Leadership

**”There is something that is much more scarce, something rarer than ability. It is the ability to recognize ability.” - Robert Half**

**Read: Acts 9:26-28**

<sup>26</sup>When he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. <sup>27</sup>But Barnabas took him, brought him to the apostles, and described for them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus. <sup>28</sup>So he went in and out among them in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.  
(NRSV)

**Questions for reflection:**

What was Barnabas’ role in this scripture?

What role does advocacy play in leadership?

What gives someone the credibility to be effective as an advocate?

**Closing Prayer:**

Lord, you have shown us what it means to be a servant. We ask now for your grace and strength to faithfully follow in the footsteps of servanthood. We pray in the name and spirit of Jesus. Amen. –  
*A Guide to Prayer*

**Notes:**

## Lesson 2, Day 5: Developing Leaders

**“Outstanding leaders go out of their way to boost the self-esteem of their personnel. If people believe in themselves, it's amazing what they can accomplish.” - Sam Walton**

### **Read: Acts 20:17-38**

<sup>17</sup>From Miletus he sent a message to Ephesus, asking the elders of the church to meet him.

<sup>18</sup>When they came to him, he said to them: “You yourselves know how I lived among you the entire time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, <sup>19</sup> serving the Lord with all humility and with tears, enduring the trials that came to me through the plots of the Jews. <sup>20</sup> I did not shrink from doing anything helpful, proclaiming the message to you and teaching you publicly and from house to house, <sup>21</sup> as I testified to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus. <sup>22</sup> And now, as a captive to the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, <sup>23</sup> except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me.

<sup>24</sup> But I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God’s grace.

<sup>25</sup> “And now I know that none of you, among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom, will ever see my face again. <sup>26</sup> Therefore I declare to you this day that I am not responsible for the blood of any of you, <sup>27</sup> for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. <sup>28</sup> Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. <sup>29</sup> I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. <sup>30</sup> Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them. <sup>31</sup> Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone with tears. <sup>32</sup> And now I commend you to God and to the message of his grace, a message that is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all who are sanctified. <sup>33</sup> I coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothing. <sup>34</sup> You know for yourselves that I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions. <sup>35</sup> In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

<sup>36</sup> When he had finished speaking, he knelt down with them all and prayed. <sup>37</sup> There was much weeping among them all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, <sup>38</sup> grieving especially because of what he had said, that they would not see him again. Then they brought him to the ship. (NRSV)

**Question for reflection:** Identify some role of leadership that you have (maybe in family, etc.) – if you knew you were leaving for an extended period of time, and could write a memo to your “staff” to equip them to go on without you, what would you tell them?

### **Closing Prayer:**

Our Father, we take our loved ones and all those who need us deeply into our hearts and there we give them completely to thee. May thy peace, the peace which passeth all understanding, rest with them, bringing thy perfect fulfillment to all their needs. Amen. –From *I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes* by Glenn Clark

## Lesson 2, Day 6: Characteristics of Leaders

**”All of the great leaders have had one characteristic in common; it was the willingness to confront unequivocally the major anxiety of their people in their time. This, and not much else, is the essence of leadership.” - John Kenneth Galbraith**

### **Read: Acts 6:1-7**

6Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. <sup>2</sup>And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. <sup>3</sup>Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, <sup>4</sup>while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.” <sup>5</sup>What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. <sup>6</sup>They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. <sup>7</sup>The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. (NRSV)

**Questions for reflection:** These passages offer some criteria for leaders.

Do you think everyone is, or can be, a leader?

In the church, how should leaders be chosen?

### **Closing Prayer:**

Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name; through Christ our Lord. Amen. *—The Book of Worship*

### **Notes:**

## Lesson 3, Day 1

### **Read: Acts 17:16-21**

<sup>16</sup>While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols. <sup>17</sup>So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and also in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. <sup>18</sup>Also some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers debated with him. Some said, “What does this babbling man want to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign divinities.” (This was because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.) <sup>19</sup>So they took him and brought him to the Areopagus and asked him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?” <sup>20</sup>It sounds rather strange to us, so we would like to know what it means.” <sup>21</sup>Now all the Athenians and the foreigners living there would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new. (NRSV)

**Question for reflection:** If someone who was not a Christian and had never been a member of a church asked you why you are a Christian (or why you go to church, or why you pray, or why you read the Bible . . .) what would you tell him or her?

**Prayer suggestion:** Pray for students in your church or community, that they might seek God’s wisdom as they are presented with the wisdom of this world.

**Notes:**

## Lesson 3, Day 2

### Read: Acts 17:22-29

<sup>22</sup>Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. <sup>23</sup>For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. <sup>24</sup>The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, <sup>25</sup>nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. <sup>26</sup>From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, <sup>27</sup>so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. <sup>28</sup>For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’ <sup>29</sup>Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. (NRSV)

**Question for reflection:** What do you think about Paul’s use of the local culture of Athens (idols, shrines, poetry, etc.) as a tool to explain the gospel?

**Prayer suggestion:** Pray for those who minister with people of other cultures in your community or district and throughout the Illinois Great Rivers Conference.

**Notes:**

## Lesson 3, Day 3

### **Read: Acts 17:30-34**

<sup>30</sup>While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, <sup>31</sup>because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” <sup>32</sup>When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed; but others said, “We will hear you again about this.” <sup>33</sup>At that point Paul left them. <sup>34</sup>But some of them joined him and became believers, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them. (NRSV)

**Question for reflection:** Those who heard Paul had one of three reactions: some refused to take him seriously, some agreed to think about it further, and some joined him as a believer. Would you say that Paul failed because not everyone accepted Jesus as Lord? Why or why not?

**Prayer suggestion:** Think of a time when you have planted or nurtured a seed of faith in someone else (perhaps by teaching a Sunday school class, visiting someone who was sick, or inviting someone to come to church with you). Pray that God will continue to grow that seed, even if you are not able to see the growth.

**Notes:**

## Lesson 3, Day 4

**Read: Excerpt from John Wesley’s “Letter on Preaching Christ” (London, Dec. 20, 1751)<sup>1</sup>**

Why, this is the very thing I assert: That the gospel Preachers [those who preach a feel-good gospel], so called, corrupt their hearers; they vitiate their taste, so that they cannot relish sound doctrine; and spoil their appetite, so that they cannot turn it into nourishment; they, as it were, feed them with sweetmeats, till the genuine wine of the kingdom seems quite insipid to them. They give them cordial upon cordial, which make them all life and spirit for the present; but, meantime, their appetite is destroyed, so that they can neither retain nor digest the pure milk of the word. . . . Preachers of this kind (though quite the contrary appears at first) spread death, not life, among their hearers.

**Question for reflection:** In trying to attract people to our church, are we ever guilty of “destroying their appetite” for taking up the cross and following Christ by portraying life with God as “all life and spirit” – as easy and happily-ever-after?

**Prayer suggestion:** Pray for those who preach and teach in your church, that they might have the courage to present both the challenges and the blessings of faithful service of God through Jesus Christ.

**Notes:**

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<sup>1</sup>John Wesley, “Letter on Preaching Christ,” *CGV (Christian Gospel Vanguard)*, [http://www.christiangospelvanguard.org.uk/preaching\\_christ.php](http://www.christiangospelvanguard.org.uk/preaching_christ.php)

## Lesson 3, Day 5

**Read: Excerpt from John Wesley's "Letter on Preaching Christ" (London, Dec. 20, 1751)<sup>2</sup>**

From the beginning they had been taught both the law and the gospel. "God loves you; therefore, love and obey him. Christ died for you; therefore, die to sin. Christ is risen; therefore, rise in the image of God. Christ liveth evermore; therefore, live to God, till you live with him in glory."

So we preached; and so you believed. This is the scriptural way, the Methodist way, the true way. God grant we may never turn therefrom, to the right hand or to the left!

**Question for reflection:** What is it about our faith from which we should "never turn therefrom, to the right hand or the left"? In other words, what is the core message of the Christian faith that should not be changed, regardless of what methods we use to present it?

**Prayer suggestion:** Pray for someone you know who does not yet have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. If you cannot think of anyone you know who is not a Christian, pray for opportunities to interact with non-Christians (or to recognize the non-Christians you encounter in your daily life).

**Notes:**

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## Lesson 3, Day 6

### Read: Acts 8:26-40

<sup>26</sup>Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a wilderness road.) <sup>27</sup>So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship <sup>28</sup>and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. <sup>29</sup>Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to this chariot and join it.” <sup>30</sup>So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” <sup>31</sup>He replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. <sup>32</sup>Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. <sup>33</sup>In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.” <sup>34</sup>The eunuch asked Philip, “About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” <sup>35</sup>Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. <sup>36</sup>As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” <sup>38</sup>He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. <sup>39</sup>When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. <sup>40</sup>But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea. (NRSV)

**Question for reflection:** When have you encountered someone who had questions that your faith could help you answer?

**Prayer suggestion:** Pray for opportunities to talk about faith with others.

**Notes:**

## Lesson 4, Day 1: Life Among Believers

**Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.** James 1:27 (NRSV)

**Read: Acts 2:42-47**

<sup>42</sup>They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup>Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. <sup>44</sup>All who believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup>they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

<sup>46</sup>Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup>praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (NRSV)

**Questions for reflection:**

This scripture describes the life among believers. What are the foundations of the early church given in Acts 2:42? How could these guide the church of today?

**Prayer:** Make us one, Lord, make us one. Holy Spirit, make us one. Let your love flow so the world will know we are one in you. Amen. (TFWS, 2224)

**Notes:**

## Lesson 4, Day 2: Believers Sharing Possessions

**How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.** 1 John 3:17-18 (NRSV)

### **Read: Acts 4:32-37**

<sup>32</sup>Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. <sup>33</sup>With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup>There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. <sup>35</sup>They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. <sup>36</sup>There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"). <sup>37</sup>He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet. (NRSV)

### **Questions for reflection:**

Deuteronomy 15:11 tells us to be openhanded towards our brother and the poor and needy in our land. What does this mean? What strings do we attach to our giving?

### **Prayer:**

Create me anew in Christ Jesus to respond to the needs of others. Open my eyes and my heart to love my neighbor as myself. Help me extend my hands, lifting up my brother and sister, and sharing what I have been given. May the words of my mouth and the actions I take be divinely inspired and kingdom centered. Amen.

### **Notes:**

## Lesson 4, Day 3: Response to Severe Famine

**Do to others as you would have them do to you.** Luke 6:31 (NRSV)

**Read: Acts 11:27-30**

<sup>27</sup>At that time prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. <sup>28</sup>One of them named Agabus stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine over all the world; and this took place during the reign of Claudius. <sup>29</sup>The disciples determined that according to their ability, each would send relief to the believers living in Judea; <sup>30</sup>this they did, sending it to the elders by Barnabas and Saul. (NRSV)

**Questions for reflection:**

What barriers (e.g. geography, money, time, language, etc.) hinder personal and church response to another in need? What facilitates our response?

**Prayer:**

Make me a servant, humble and meek. Lord, let me lift up those who are weak. And may the prayer of my heart always be: make me a servant, make me a servant, make me a servant today. Amen. (TFWS 2176)

**Notes:**

## Lesson 4, Day 4

**Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** Matthew 5:3 (NRSV)

**Read: Deuteronomy 8:11-20**

<sup>11</sup>Take care that you do not forget the LORD your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today. <sup>12</sup>When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, <sup>13</sup>and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, <sup>14</sup>then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, <sup>15</sup>who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, <sup>16</sup>and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good. <sup>17</sup>Do not say to yourself, “My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.” <sup>18</sup>But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today. <sup>19</sup>If you do forget the LORD your God and follow other gods to serve and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. <sup>20</sup>Like the nations that the LORD is destroying before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God. (NRSV)

### Questions for reflection:

Based on this scripture from Deuteronomy, what does it mean to be “poor in spirit”? How are we to view possessions, wealth, accomplishments? As a gift from God or fruit from our own labor?

How do you view “the poor”? As victims of circumstance or causative of their own condition or situation?

**Prayer:** Lord, help me to be poor in spirit, to humbly acknowledge that all I am and all I have is a gift from you. Thank you! Amen.

**Notes:**

## Lesson 4, Day 5

**I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.** Matthew 25:36 (NRSV)

**Read: Excerpt from John Wesley’s “On Visiting the Sick” (Sermon 98)<sup>3</sup>**

1. By the sick, I do not mean only those that keep their bed, or that are sick in the strictest sense. Rather I would include all such as are in a state of affliction, whether of mind or body; and that whether they are good or bad, whether they fear God or not.

2. But is there need of visiting them in person? May we not relieve them at a distance? Does it not answer the same purpose if we send them help as if we carry it ourselves?" Many are so circumstanced that they cannot attend the sick in person; and where this is the real case it is undoubtedly sufficient for them to send help, being the only expedient they can use. But this is not properly visiting the sick; it is another thing. The word which we render visit, in its literal acceptance, means to look upon. And this, you well know, cannot be done unless you are present with them. To send them assistance is, therefore, entirely a different thing from visiting them. The former, then, ought to be done, but the latter not left undone.

One great reason why the rich, in general, have so little sympathy for the poor, is, because they so seldom visit them. Hence it is, that, according to the common observation, one part of the world does not know what the other suffers. Many of them do not know, because they do not care to know: they keep out of the way of knowing it; and then plead their voluntary ignorances as an excuse for their hardness of heart. "Indeed, Sir," said person of large substance, "I am a very compassionate man. But, to tell you the truth, I do not know anybody in the world that is in want." How did this come to pass? Why, he took good care to keep out of their way; and if he fell upon any of them unawares "he passed over on the other side."

**Questions for reflection:** John Wesley posed three questions in Sermon 98: What is implied in visiting the sick? How is it to be performed? By whom? How do you answer these questions?

**Prayer:** When I step out of my comfort zone and into the world of need, strengthen and equip me in love. Help me to see clearly another’s circumstance and give the resources I need to go the extra mile for my neighbor. Amen.

**Notes:**

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<sup>3</sup> John Wesley, "On Visiting the Sick" (Sermon 98), *Global Ministries*, General Board of Global Ministries, <http://new.gb-gm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/98/>.

## Lesson 4, Day 6

**When was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?** Matthew 25:37 (NRSV)

**Read: Matthew 25:31-40**

<sup>31</sup>“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. <sup>32</sup>All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, <sup>33</sup>and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. <sup>34</sup>Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; <sup>35</sup>for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup>I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ <sup>37</sup>Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? <sup>38</sup>And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? <sup>39</sup>And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ <sup>40</sup>And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ (NRSV)

**Questions for reflection:**

What changes does ministry “to” or ministry “with” the poor cause in you spiritually?

Beth Lindsay Templeton writes: “mercy is action. We put ourselves in the other’s place to try to see, taste, touch, hear, and smell the world as he or she does.”<sup>4</sup> How are you, as an individual and as the church, walking in another’s shoes? What “charge to keep” (see UMH 413) does this scripture elicit?

**Prayer:** Thank you, God, for I have been blessed with abundance. Lead me into action. May I be a witness to Jesus Christ in the world through my acts of mercy. Amen.

**Notes:**

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<sup>4</sup> Beth Lindsay Templeton, *Loving Our Neighbor: A Thoughtful Approach to Helping People in Poverty* (New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2008), 9.

## Lesson 5, Day 1

### Read: Acts 3:1-12

<sup>1</sup>One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon. <sup>2</sup>And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple. <sup>3</sup>When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. <sup>4</sup>Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." <sup>5</sup>And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. <sup>6</sup>But Peter said, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." <sup>7</sup>And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. <sup>8</sup>Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. <sup>9</sup>All the people saw him walking and praising God, <sup>10</sup>and they recognized him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. <sup>11</sup>While he clung to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's Portico, utterly astonished.

<sup>12</sup>When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, "You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?"

**Questions for reflection:** Why do you believe Peter healed the lame man? What was the effect of the healing on the bystanders?

**Prayer suggestion:** Pray for those who are disabled and the many challenges they face in their daily life.

**Notes:**

## Lesson 5, Day 2

### **Read: Acts 5:12-16**

<sup>12</sup>Now many signs and wonders were done among the people through the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. <sup>13</sup>None of the rest dared to join them, but the people held them in high esteem. <sup>14</sup>Yet more than ever believers were added to the Lord, great numbers of both men and women, <sup>15</sup>so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on cots and mats, in order that Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he came by. <sup>16</sup>A great number of people would also gather from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all cured.

**Questions for reflection:** What do you make of the belief that even being touched by Peter's shadow would bring healing? How is healing different from magic?

**Prayer suggestion:** Pray for those who suffer from diseases, particularly in parts of the world where medical help is insufficient, and for those who seek to bring healing in those places.

**Notes:**

## Lesson 5, Day 3

### Read: Acts 14:8-20

<sup>8</sup>In Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet and had never walked, for he had been crippled from birth. <sup>9</sup>He listened to Paul as he was speaking. And Paul, looking at him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, <sup>10</sup>said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And the man sprang up and began to walk. <sup>11</sup>When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!” <sup>12</sup>Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. <sup>13</sup>The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates; he and the crowds wanted to offer sacrifice. <sup>14</sup>When the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting, <sup>15</sup>“Friends, why are you doing this? We are mortals just like you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. <sup>16</sup>In past generations he allowed all the nations to follow their own ways; <sup>17</sup>yet he has not left himself without a witness in doing good—giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy.” <sup>18</sup>Even with these words, they scarcely restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them.

<sup>19</sup>But Jews came there from Antioch and Iconium and won over the crowds. Then they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. <sup>20</sup>But when the disciples surrounded him, he got up and went into the city. The next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.

**Question for reflection:** Imagine what the “Jews” from Antioch and Iconium must have said to convert the crowd. How could the crowd have gone from thinking Paul and Barnabas were gods to stoning Paul and dragging him out of the city?

**Prayer suggestion:** Pray for medical workers in the inner city and in developing nations around the world who face violence and oppression.

**Notes:**

## Lesson 5, Day 4

### Read: Acts 4:23-31

<sup>23</sup>After they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. <sup>24</sup>When they heard it, they raised their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and everything in them, <sup>25</sup>it is you who said by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant: 'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples imagine vain things? <sup>26</sup>The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers have gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah.' <sup>27</sup>For in this city, in fact, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, <sup>28</sup>to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. <sup>29</sup>And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness, <sup>30</sup>while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." <sup>31</sup>When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.

### Questions for reflection:

- Given the reactions of the crowds in the previous three readings, why was it so important for the believers to pray for boldness?
- What does this passage say about the source of the healings?

**Prayer suggestion:** Pray that the Holy Spirit may give you the boldness to reach out to those who are sick in body, in spirit, or in relationship.

### Notes:

## Lesson 5, Day 5

### Read: Acts 9:32-42

<sup>32</sup>Now as Peter went here and there among all the believers, he came down also to the saints living in Lydda. <sup>33</sup>There he found a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years, for he was paralyzed. <sup>34</sup>Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed!” And immediately he got up. <sup>35</sup>And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

<sup>36</sup>Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. <sup>37</sup>At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. <sup>38</sup>Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, “Please come to us without delay.” <sup>39</sup>So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. <sup>40</sup>Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, “Tabitha, get up.” Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. <sup>41</sup>He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. <sup>42</sup>This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

**Questions for reflection:** Apart from the healings themselves, what was the result of both of these healings? Why do you suppose the people’s reaction was different from the reaction of those who declared Paul and Barnabas to be gods, or from those who wanted them put to death?

**Prayer suggestion:** Pray that the Holy Spirit may help you to see the hand of God in the events of your daily life and to participate in the things that God is doing.

**Notes:**

## Lesson 5, Day 6

### **Read: Excerpt from John Wesley's "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists"**<sup>5</sup>

XII. 1. But I was still in pain for many of the poor that were sick; there was so great expense, and so little profit. And first, I resolved to try, whether they might not receive more benefit in the hospitals. Upon the trial, we found there was indeed less expense, but no more good done, than before. I then asked the advice of several Physicians for them; but still it profited not. I saw the poor people pining away, and several families ruined, and that without remedy.

2. At length I thought of a kind of desperate expedient. "I will prepare, and give them physic myself." For six or seven and twenty years, I had made anatomy and physic the diversion of my leisure hours; though I never properly studied them, unless for a few months when I was going to America, where I imagined I might be of some service to those who had no regular Physician among them. I applied to it again. I took into my assistance an Apothecary, and an experienced Surgeon; resolving, at the same time, not to go out of my depth, but to leave all difficult and complicated cases to such Physicians as the patients should choose.

3. I gave notice of this to the society; telling them, that all who were ill of chronical distempers (for I did not care to venture upon acute) might, if they pleased, come to me at such a time, and I would give them the best advice I could, and the best medicines I had.

4. Many came: (And so every Friday since:) Among the rest was one William Kirkman, a weaver, near Old Nicholstreet. I asked him, "What complaint have you?" "O Sir," said he, "a cough, a very sore cough. I can get no rest day nor night."

I asked, "How long have you had it?" He replied, "About threescore years: It began when I was eleven years old." I was nothing glad that this man should come first, fearing our not curing him might discourage others. However, I looked up to God, and said, "Take this three or four times a day. If it does you no good, it will do you no harm." He took it two or three days. His cough was cured, and has not returned to this day.

**Questions for reflection:** Would you consider Mr. Kirkman's healing miraculous? Does healing have to be miraculous to come from God?

**Prayer suggestion:** Pray for those who lack access to quality medical care.

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<sup>5</sup> John Wesley, "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists," in *The Methodist Societies History, Nature, and Design*, vol. 9, *The Bicentennial Edition of The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Rupert E. Davies (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976--), 275-276.

## Lesson 6, Day 1

### Read: Acts 13:2-12

<sup>2</sup>While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” <sup>3</sup>Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

<sup>4</sup>So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia; and from there they sailed to Cyprus. <sup>5</sup>When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John also to assist them. <sup>6</sup>When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they met a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet, named Bar-Jesus. <sup>7</sup>He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and wanted to hear the word of God. <sup>8</sup>But the magician Elymas (for that is the translation of his name) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul away from the faith. <sup>9</sup>But Saul, also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him <sup>10</sup>and said, “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? <sup>11</sup>And now listen—the hand of the Lord is against you, and you will be blind for a while, unable to see the sun.” Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he went about groping for someone to lead him by the hand. <sup>12</sup>When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was astonished at the teaching about the Lord. (NRSV)

**Questions for reflection:** Barnabas and Saul were set apart for a certain work. Have you ever felt that the Holy Spirit has set you apart to do a certain work? What can we set apart for God in our lives?

**Prayer suggestion:** Pray for the leaders in your church, the community and the world who have been set apart that they may serve with faithfulness and justice.

**Notes:**

## Lesson 6, Day 2

**Read: Acts 16:6**

They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. (NRSV)

**Questions for reflection:** The Holy Spirit prevented Paul from going to Asia. How do we know when it is the Holy Spirit leading? Do you rely on the people of faith to help you understand the Spirit's direction?

**Prayer suggestion:** Pray for courage to accept God's will for your life.

**Notes:**

## Lesson 6, Day 3

### Read: Acts 19:1-10

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. <sup>2</sup>He said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” They replied, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” <sup>3</sup>Then he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They answered, “Into John’s baptism.” <sup>4</sup>Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.” <sup>5</sup>On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup>When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied— <sup>7</sup>altogether there were about twelve of them.

<sup>8</sup>He entered the synagogue and for three months spoke out boldly, and argued persuasively about the kingdom of God. <sup>9</sup>When some stubbornly refused to believe and spoke evil of the Way before the congregation, he left them, taking the disciples with him, and argued daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. <sup>10</sup>This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord. (NRSV)

**Questions for reflection:** Why do you think Paul asked the question about the disciples’ baptism? What role does the Holy Spirit play in Paul’s work in this text? What do you think Paul’s desire is for the new disciples beyond the baptism they had received?

**Prayer suggestion:** Paul never gave up. He continued to share the faith even during difficult times. Pray that you may have the perseverance of Paul.

**Notes:**

## Lesson 6, Day 4

### Read Acts 20:20-23

<sup>20</sup>I did not shrink from doing anything helpful, proclaiming the message to you and teaching you publicly and from house to house, <sup>21</sup>as I testified to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus. <sup>22</sup>And now, as a captive to the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, <sup>23</sup>except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me. (NRSV)

**Questions for reflection:** Paul was told by the Holy Spirit that he would face many trials. Why do you think he continued? What was it about his faith that compelled him despite the possible consequences?

**Prayer suggestion:** Pray for your friends, members from your congregation, and people throughout the world that face difficult trials.

**Notes:**

## Lesson 6, Day 5

### Read Acts 6:9-10

<sup>9</sup>Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and others of those from Cilicia and Asia, stood up and argued with Stephen. <sup>10</sup>But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke. (NRSV)

**Questions for reflection:** When Stephen stood up and exercised his spiritual gifts, the text says the people could not stand up against the wisdom the Holy Spirit gave him. Do you know what your spiritual gifts are that empower your ministry? If you do not know, do you know how to find out your gifts?

**Prayer suggestion:** Pray that God may give clarity to your spiritual gifts and how to faithfully use them in God's service.

**Notes:**

## Lesson 6, Day 6

### Read Acts 18:9-10

<sup>9</sup>One night the Lord said to Paul in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; <sup>10</sup>for I am with you, and no one will lay a hand on you to harm you, for there are many in this city who are my people.” (NRSV)

**Questions for reflection:** God doesn't want us to be timid about the faith. In the words of the old expression, when one door closes another one opens. Some doors do close in life but others are waiting and people are anxious to hear what God has done in your life. Who do you think God wants you to speak to about the faith? Of what does God not want you to be afraid?

**Prayer suggestion:** Pray that God will provide an opportunity for you to share your witness without fear.

**Notes:**