

40 DAYS THROUGH THE BOOK

STUDY GUIDE + STREAMING VIDEO

SIX SESSIONS

# ACTS

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THE REVOLUTION OF FAITH

RANDY FRAZEE

4🎵 DAYS THROUGH THE BOOK

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THE REVOLUTION OF FAITH

STUDY GUIDE + STREAMING VIDEO | 6 SESSIONS

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WITH KEVIN AND SHERRY HARNEY



Harper*Christian*  
Resources

*40 Days Through the Book: Acts Study Guide*

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ISBN 978-0-310-15976-6 (softcover)

ISBN 978-0-310-15977-3 (ebook)

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Published in association with Don Gates of the literary agency The Gates Group—[www.the-gatesgroup.com](http://www.the-gatesgroup.com).

First Printing March 2023 / Printed in the United States of America

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# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

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## SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

Welcome to the *40 Days Through the Book* study on the book of Acts! During the course of the next six weeks, you and your fellow group members will embark on an in-depth exploration of the disciple Luke's message to believers in the Church. During this study, you will learn when he wrote the book, approximately when it was written, and the background and context in which it was written. But, more importantly, through the teaching by Randy Frazee, you will explore the key themes that John relates in the book—and how his teachings apply to you today.

## SESSION OUTLINE

The *40 Days Through the Book* video and study guide are designed to be experienced both in group settings (such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or small group gatherings) as well as in your individual study time. Each session begins with an

introductory reading and question. You will then watch the video message. (Play the DVD or refer to the instructions on the inside front cover on how to access the sessions at any time through streaming.) An outline has been provided in the guide for you to take notes and gather your reflections as you watch the video. Next, if you are doing this study with a group, you will engage in a time of directed discussion, review the memory verses for the week, and close with a time of prayer. (Note that if your group is larger, you may wish to watch the videos together and then break into smaller groups of four to six people, to ensure that everyone has time to participate in discussions.)

## 40-DAY JOURNEY

What is truly unique about this study, and all of the other studies in the *40 Days Through the Book* series, are the daily learning resources that will lead you into a deeper engagement with the text. Each week, you will be given a set of daily readings, with accompanying reflection questions, to help you explore the material that you covered during your group time.

The first day's reading will focus on the key verse to memorize for the week. In the other weekly readings, you will be invited to read a passage from the book of Acts, reflect on the text, and then respond with some guided journal questions. On the final day, you will review the key verse again and recite it from memory. As you work through the six weeks' worth of material in this section, you will read (and, in some cases, reread) the entire book of Acts.

Now, you may be wondering why you will be doing this over the course of *forty* days. Certainly, there is nothing special about that number. But there is something biblical about it. In the Bible, the number forty typically designates a time of *testing*. Noah was in the ark for forty days. Moses lived forty years in Egypt and another forty years in the desert before he led God's people. He spent forty days on Mount Sinai receiving God's laws and sent spies, for forty days, to investigate the land of Canaan. Later, God sent the prophet Jonah to warn ancient Nineveh, for forty days, that its destruction would come because of the people's sins.

Even more critically, in the New Testament we read that Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness, fasting and praying. It marked a critical transition point in his ministry—the place where he set about to fulfill the mission that God had intended. During this time Jesus was tested relentlessly by the enemy . . . and prevailed. When he returned to Galilee, he was a different person than the man who had entered into the wilderness forty days before. The same will be true for you as you commit to this forty-day journey through Acts.

## GROUP FACILITATION

If you are doing this study with a group, everyone should have a copy of this study guide. Not only will this help you engage when your group is meeting, but it will also allow you to fully enter into the *40 Days* learning experience. Keep in mind the video, questions, and activities are simply tools to

help you engage with the session. The real power and life-transformation will come as you dig into the Scriptures and seek to live out the truths you learn along the way.

Finally, you will need to appoint a leader or facilitator for the group who is responsible for starting the video teaching and for keeping track of time during discussions and activities. Leaders may also read questions aloud and monitor discussions, prompting participants to respond and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to participate. For more thorough instructions on this role, see the Leader's Guide included at the back of this guide.



## INTRODUCTION

# THE REVOLUTION OF FAITH

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### AUTHOR, DATE, AND LOCATION

Although neither the Gospel of Luke nor the Book of Acts has Luke's name directly attributed to it, there was unanimous consensus in the early Church that Luke the physician was the author of *both*. The Book of Luke is Part One and contains the story of Jesus' birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension back to heaven. The Book of Acts is Part Two of Luke's work and picks up right where the gospel finishes off. It tells the story of the ascension of Jesus and continues on with the birth, growth, and dramatic spread of the church from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

Both Luke and Acts were written to Luke's dear friend Theophilus (Luke 1:3 and Acts 1:1). Luke was most likely a Gentile (non-Jew) and he experienced parts of what we read in the Book of Acts firsthand. We know this because Luke writes in the first-person plural using "we" for almost a hundred

verses of the Book of Acts. He was there! This means that Acts was written in the lifetime of Luke and he was there when many of these things happened.

## THE BIG PICTURE

Before Jesus ascended to heaven (after his resurrection and appearances) he gave a very specific command to his followers. We find it at the very beginning of the Book of Acts:

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).*

This was a call to a revolution of faith that would begin right where they lived, shopped, played, and worshipped (Jerusalem). It would spread to the surrounding community (Judea). The good news would also go to the places that many of the early followers of Jesus avoided and had no interest in visiting (Samaria). Finally, like a rapidly spreading contagion, the message, truth, and power of Jesus would extend to the ends of the earth!

As you read the book of Acts, you will discover that the structure of the narrative actually follows the order found in Acts 1:8. Along the way Luke gives continual updates on how this mission was being carried out and the success of God’s people as they followed the leading of the Holy Spirit. The Book of Acts is a joyful celebration of how God’s revolutionary message was unstoppable and contagious.

This inspiring book of the Bible is encouraging and filled with hope. Because the God we meet in the Scriptures is the same yesterday, today, and forever, we can live with true optimism. We follow the same Messiah that led the early church. We are filled with the same Spirit of power who used his church to transform the ancient world. We worship the same God who loves with so much passion that he sent his one and only Son to give his life for our salvation (John 3:16).

When we come to the end of chapter 28 of Acts, we realize that the completion of this account of the birth and growth of the church is *not* the end of the story. It is a new beginning. We are writing Acts chapter 29 right now. The church is still alive and powerful! God is on the move. If we are willing to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, we can see the same revolution of faith continue in our world today.

## EPIC THEMES

There are several themes in Acts that are worthy of our focus. Some of these include:

**The Church is more dynamic than we dream.** The church that Jesus started is not buildings scattered around a community. It is not a collection of rules and regulations or a religious structure. The church is the revolutionary people of God bringing the good news of Jesus from where they are to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:1–6:7).

**The journey of following Jesus and spreading his love will demand sacrifice and suffering.** From the very beginning of the Church, God's people discovered that there would

be battles and struggles. In many situations, the suffering of God's people led to the spread of the world-changing message of God's grace (Acts 6:8–9:31).

**How Christians live and love has direct impact on the success of the revolution Jesus started.** Christians are not flawless but we are called to love, serve, care and reflect the heart and very presence of Jesus. As the people of God live as the saints of God, the truth of Jesus spreads quickly in a hurting and broken world (Acts 9:32–12:24).

**Grace is the secret sauce of God's revolution.** We live in a graceless and conflicted world. It has always been this way. When God's people hold to the truth and wrap it in the amazing grace of Jesus the Messiah, people of all sorts are willing to investigate the person of Jesus and the mission of the church. When this happens, the revolution of faith continues (Acts 12:25–16:5).

**The church is God's vehicle to spread the good news of Jesus next door and to the ends of the earth.** There is a contagious nature to the love of God and grace that Jesus came to unleash. Christians are called to get near people from every walk of life . . . close enough to spread the viral goodness of our God (Acts 16:6–19:20).

**God's way and not my way!** It is easy to slip into a mentality that says, "I will do God's will my way." If we are going to be part of the call to share the revolutionary faith that Jesus brought into the world, we must learn to do it his way. Humble surrender is essential if this is going to happen. As we count the cost, follow Jesus' ways, and sacrifice for our Savior, his good news will spread next door and to the ends of the earth (Acts 19:21–28:31).

There is reason for confident optimism about the future of the church. God's plan to reach the whole world with his love, truth, and hope is still intact. There might be cultural resistance and bumps along the way but as you read through the Book of Acts you will quickly realize that this has always been the case. Surprisingly, you will discover that there was greater resistance to the message of Jesus 2,000 years ago than there is in most places today. As you dig into this study, you will hear a consistent invitation to join the revolution of faith that Jesus started two millennia ago. If you are willing to press passionately into this study, you will find yourself encouraged, hopeful and engaged in the work of Jesus in new and exciting ways.

# HERE'S THE CHURCH

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ACTS 1:1–6:7

*Many people see churches as a series of disconnected and random buildings scattered around their town, city, or village. God sees the church as his united and revolutionary people placed in every part of our world. The church is not an antiquated religious organization. It is a living and dynamic body of God's people who continue to grow and transform the world for the glory of Jesus.*

## WELCOME

Things that are common and right in front of us are often greatly misunderstood. Think about the sun. We see it all the time so we assume we know all about it. But, did you know the

sun is 864,000 miles in diameter and is 109 times *wider* than our earth? How many planets the size of the earth do you think could fit inside the sun? The answer will blow your mind! It is 1,300,000! In other words, the sun is HUGE! How hot is the sun? Look at it this way, water boils at 212 degrees Fahrenheit. That's hot! But at the core, the sun is about 27,000,000 degrees Fahrenheit. It is hard for us to even imagine that kind of ferocious heat. Maybe we don't know as much about the sun as we thought we did.

The church is a lot like that. There are churches all over the place. Many people who are doing this 40 Day Study through Acts have been part of the church their whole life. Because it is so familiar to many people, there is a sense that we understand the church. But there is a whole lot more to the church than most of us begin to dream.

Many people see the church as primarily a human-led organization. Churches hold worship services, ask for offerings, do weddings, and bury people. Though this might be true, there is so much more. Churches are Holy Spirit infused living organisms that are dynamic, alive, and changing the world around them.

Countless people think of the church as dying or dead. The truth is, the global church is growing, expanding, and still fulfilling the mission Jesus declared two thousand years ago. There are more followers of Jesus in the world today than in any time in history and there is a larger percentage of Americans who attend church now than there were at the turn of the twentieth century.

Some people see the church as a remnant of the past that

will soon evaporate and disappear into the rear-view mirror of history. God sees his church as a revolutionary movement that will continue to bring global transformation until Jesus comes again in glory.

Yes, the church has been around for a long time. Indeed, there are lots of church buildings around your community. No doubt, there are challenges facing the church in our modern world. But don't let anyone fool you. The church is still God's plan to bring the love, grace, and truth of heaven to our broken world.

The sun is bigger and hotter than most of us recognize. So is the church! Infused by the very power of heaven, the church is alive and active in our world and more powerful than any of us could imagine.

## SHARE

What was your perception of the church when you were a child, and how has it changed through the years?

## WATCH

Play the video for session one. (Play the DVD or see the instructions on the inside front cover on how to access the sessions through streaming.) As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts, questions, or key points that stand out to you.



## ACTS

A Sunday School lesson you will never forget. Here's  
the church . . .

Defining the word "Revolution"

Revolution = A complete change (Acts 1:1–8)

Meeting Dr. Luke, the author of the Book of Acts

The person and power of the Holy Spirit

The mission of the church (expanding to the ends of the earth)

## HERE'S THE CHURCH

Insights from Dr. Rodney Start

Revolution = A complete circle

A powerful movement of the Holy Spirit

A radical change in the life of Peter

Small gatherings with massive impact

The life of the church

## ACTS

Fellowship and breaking bread

Apostolic teaching and prayer

Radical giving and serving

Numerical growth (More followers of Jesus)

Closed networks or open networks?

An update on the revolution: Be hopeful

## DISCUSS

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture. Use the following questions to help guide your discussion.

1. What impacted you the most as you watched Randy's teaching on the Book of Acts?
2. When you think about a revolution (in light of Randy's teaching), what images come to your mind, and how can the church be a revolutionary movement of faith in our world?
3. **Read** Acts 1:4–8. What are ways that the Holy Spirit of God infused and empowered the church in the first century and how do you see that same Spirit alive and at work in the church today?

## ACTS

4. **Read** Acts 2:1–4, 14–18, and 40–41. This passage talks about the same Peter who had denied Jesus three times just a few days earlier. How did the Holy Spirit change Peter? How has the presence and power of God’s Spirit brought change in your life?
  
5. **Read** Acts 2:42–47. Describe some of the behaviors, practices, and attitudes that marked the lives of the early Christians described in this passage. How are these things similar or different than what you see in the church today?
  
6. What are specific and practical things Christians can do today to increase **one** of these markers of church health?
  - Creating places for connecting together in larger community settings and smaller home gatherings
  
  - Building a community where people know they belong and are not alone

## HERE'S THE CHURCH

- Nurturing an environment of learning, praying, and growing in faith
  
  - Encouraging acts of service and sacrifice for the sake of others
  
  - Reaching out to spiritual seekers and loving them right where they are
7. Through all of his extensive studies, Dr. Stark learned that one of the most powerful ways that the church has continued to grow and change the world is through being an open network and not closed to new people. What are ways your church can avoid being closed and grow more committed to being open to people in your community from every walk of life?

## MEMORIZE

Each session, you will be given a key verse (or verses) from the passage covered in the video teaching to memorize. This week, your memory verse is from Acts 1:8:

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

Have everyone recite this verse out loud. Ask for any volunteers who would like to say the verse from memory.

## RESPOND

What will you take away from this session? What is one practical next step you can take that will strengthen your church and unleash the staggering potential God has placed in the community of believers that you are part of?

## PRAY

Close your group time by praying in any of the following directions:

- Thank God for the great things he is doing through his church around the world and right in the congregation where you are part of his family.
- Ask the Spirit of God to move in fresh and powerful ways in your church and in another church in your community.
- Pray for God to grow your passion for the church and your personal engagement in the life of your church.



## YOUR 40-DAY JOURNEY

# SESSION ONE

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**R**eflect on the material you have covered in this session by engaging in the following between-session learning resources. Each week, you will begin by reviewing the key verse(s) to memorize for the session. During the next five days, you will have an opportunity to read a portion of Acts 1:1–6:7 and reflect on what you learn, respond by taking action, journal some of your insights, and pray about what God has taught you. Finally, the last day, you will review the key verse(s) and reflect on what you have learned for the week.

### DAY 1

**Memorize:** Begin this week’s study by reciting Acts 1:8:

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

Now try to say the verse from memory.

**Reflect:** We tend to rely on our strength, national might, personal wealth, relational alliances, and all sorts of other sources of power. Jesus was crystal clear that true power for God's people and his church come from the Holy Spirit. If we want to see the world transformed, it will only happen through our partnership with the Spirit of God. What are ways you can recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life and unleash the Spirit's activity in your home and church?

## DAY 2

**Read:** Acts 1.

**Reflect:** In the sixth verse of this passage the disciples gathered around Jesus and asked him if it was finally time for them to be in charge. Their nation was under the heel of the heavy boot of Rome. They believed that the Messiah would come as a political and military conqueror and crush the Romans and drive their forces out of the land. That was their expectation and dream. Even after three years of walking with Jesus, watching his ministry and listening to his preaching, they still did not get it. So, the risen Jesus patiently taught them again that his kingdom was not about political victory but spiritual transformation. They were not going to rule their land. Jesus was going to save the lost people of the world and they would be his partners in this mission. What are some of the misconceptions of what we want Jesus to do (often for us or against others) and how can you keep your heart and eyes focused on his mission and not your own desires?

**Journal:**

- What might the church look like if we let our focal point be on gaining political power and personal victory?
- What will the church look like if we stay locked on the mission of Jesus to seek and save the lost and be witnesses from where we are to the ends of the earth?

**Pray:** Confess where you tend to see Jesus as a tool to get what you want in terms of control, power, and authority over others. Ask for a humble heart that longs for Jesus to draw the lost sheep of this world to his shepherd-heart and prayerfully commit to join in his mission.

## DAY 3

**Read:** Acts 2.

**Reflect:** Bold conviction is in short supply in our world and often in the church. In Acts 2:36–41 we see Peter, infused with the Holy Spirit, boldly calling people to repentance. He reminded them of their part in putting Jesus on the cross. He called them to turn from sin. He told them that the source of forgiveness is found in Jesus. Peter warned them. He pled with

them. He called them to flee their wicked generation. Let's just say Peter laid it down! He held nothing back! Why are we often timid when it comes to sharing about Jesus? What would it look like if you were bold and confident in talking about your faith and the love, goodness, and truth of Jesus?

**Journal:**

- What sorts of risks was Peter facing when he spoke to this crowd in this manner and why do you think he was willing to count the cost?
- What holds you back from speaking the truth of Jesus? What consequences and costs might you face if you began speaking about your faith with increased confidence and consistency?

**Pray:** Ask the Spirit of God to grow your boldness when it comes to talking about Jesus and your love for him.

**DAY 4**

**Read:** Acts 3.

**Reflect:** For his whole life he had been a beggar. The man Peter and John encountered in Acts 3 had been placed near the

temple day after day so he could receive alms from those going to worship. This was both his living and his life. Then, in one moment, everything changed! The beggar saw the disciples and made his request. "May I have some money?" Both Peter and John looked directly at him. They saw him not as a beggar but as a man who needed what only Jesus could offer. They asked him to lift his head and look at them. Then they made an offer he had never heard before. Peter and John did not give him what he wanted (money) but they gave him what he needed most (healing in the name of Jesus). How has God given you what you need most in the name of Jesus and how can you offer this same gift to others?

**Journal:**

- What are ways you settle for less than what God wants to give you?
- What are specific ways God has given you more than you ever dared to ask or dream through the gift of Jesus?

**Pray:** Praise Jesus for meeting you in your places of deepest need and thank him for the people in your life who have been conduits of God's grace into your life.

## DAY 5

**Read:** Acts 4.

**Reflect:** In Acts 4:32–35 we get a snapshot of the heartbeat and culture of the early church. It is beautiful, inspiring, and shocking. These Jesus followers were unified in their hearts, minds, and behaviors. They shared with revolutionary generosity. They spoke freely of the goodness of their resurrected Savior. As they did this, the power of God poured through them in signs and wonders that pointed people to the goodness of God. Why do you think so many Christians stand in opposition to each other and what will help us live with increasing unity?

**Journal:**

- What are some ways you can help grow the unity in your church in terms of how people think (unity in mind)?
- What are some ways you can help grow the unity in your church in terms of how people feel and care for others (unity in heart)?

**Pray:** Ask God to humble the hearts of people in your church (including yourself) so that unity will grow and the world will be amazed by how you love each other and stand together in your faith.

## DAY 6

**Read:** Acts 5:1–6:7.

**Reflect:** Imagine standing before the Supreme Court and knowing that they are not happy with you. They are powerful, they have authority to bring punishment, and you are their target. That's exactly what was happening to Peter and the other apostles in this chapter (v. 27 in particular). So how would they respond? Would they bend, compromise, and back off their mission? The answer to that question becomes absolutely clear in Acts 5:29–32. They doubled down! They ramped up! They followed Jesus and declared his truth no matter what the cost. How do you think you would have responded if you had been standing before the Jewish high court in the exact place where Peter and the apostles stood?

**Journal:**

- What are ways you can be tempted to compromise or back off when you feel pressured about your faith in Jesus?
- What are ways you can prepare to stand strong when the heat is on and people are pushing back against your faith?

**Pray:** Ask the Spirit of God to prepare you to be confident and articulate when you encounter people who disagree with or push back against your faith.

## DAY 7

**Memorize:** Conclude this week's personal study by again reciting Acts 1:8:

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

**Reflect:** Where should we be sharing our faith? Jesus calls us to be ready and willing to be a witness of his goodness, grace, and truth wherever we go. **Jerusalem** is our family, hometown, and the places we find ourselves day in and day out. **Judea** is our surrounding community. **Samaria** is one of the places most people avoid and where we might not want to go. The **ends of the earth** are exactly that . . . anywhere God might bring us. What is your Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and ends of the earth? Take time right now to quietly commit, in your heart, to prepare yourself to be a witness of Jesus' amazing grace and life-changing truth wherever you go. Offer yourself to Jesus today, "*Savior and Leader of my life. Please open doors for me to be your witness today and every day of my life. For your glory and the sake of the world. Amen!*"