

YOBL

Year of Biblical Literacy

Week 42: A Community Following Jesus, Part 2 - Reflection on Acts

Daily Reading for Week

- Acts 15-16, Psalm 126
- Acts 17-18, Psalm 127
- Acts 19-20, Psalm 128
- Acts 21-22, Psalm 129
- Acts 23-24, Psalm 130
- Acts 25-26, Psalm 131
- Acts 27-28, Psalm 132
- Read Scripture Video: Acts 1-12 and Acts 13-28

Focus of time together

To journal through a selection of passages from the Book of Acts in order to intimately engage with the life and world of the early church, particularly experiencing some of the surprise and scandal that is the context the rest of the New Testament.

Connecting Exercise

Spend two minutes in silence pondering one way that God has surprised you lately. Then invite one another to share briefly about this experience.

Opening Prayer

Intro to Discussion

Last week, we slowed down to reflect on our favourite Gospel passages. This week, we will take a similarly slow and quiet journey through the Book of Acts. Next week, we will move from Acts into Romans and the epistles and try to understand how the communal tensions we see here in Acts create the real-life questions to which the epistles seek to provide answers. This journey will be a crucial stepping stone into rightly understanding the rest of the Bible so we will try to take our time and digest as much as we can.

To do so, we will read six different passages and pause between each to reflect and journal in response to a prompt. Then we will break out into small groups to discuss

which passage and prompt affected us the most deeply. As you read along, highlight or underline any words or texts that stand out so that you can return to them.

Whole Group Discussion (60 minutes)

Questions for Interacting with Scripture

These questions are to help us slow down, to taste and notice Scripture, savour its richness and meditate on its complexity of meaning.

Read Acts 2 (Pentecost)

Journal Prompt (5 minutes)

In reaction to hearing “the wonders of God” in their own languages, the crowd of Gentile-born Jews “came together in bewilderment,” utterly amazed.” Later, “Everyone was filled with awe and at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles” (Acts 2:43). What part of this passage fills you with similar wonder or amazement?

Read Acts 11:1-18

Journal Prompt (5 minutes)

None of the early Christ-followers, Peter included, had understood that Jesus’ death and resurrection meant the disintegration of the dividing line between Jew and Gentile. How do you think this surprising and scandalous inclusion of the non-Jewish world felt to Peter and the disciples? How humbling do you think it was for Peter to realise he had been “standing in God’s way” as an obstacle to these outsiders?

Read Acts 13:16-52

Journal Prompt (5 minutes)

Put yourselves in the shoes of the unbelieving Jewish leaders, like Saul of Tarsus before his conversion. While foreigners who previously knew nothing about God “were glad and honoured the word of the Lord,” (13:48), most Jews who had been giving their entire lives to practicing faithfulness to God “were filled to jealousy” (13:45) and even “stirred up persecution” against them (13:50). What must it have felt like to face ideas about God and others that were just too different from their preconceptions to get behind? Have you ever felt this kind of infuriating shock before?

Read Acts 22:3-22

Journal Prompt (5 minutes)

Of all the seemingly crazy and scandalous things Paul says, it is his last statement about being sent away to the Gentiles (22:21) that crosses a line that makes some of the Jews want to kill him (22:22). Have you ever experienced a time when a community’s inclusion of others sparked rage and hatred? Have you been included in this way? Have you ever been excluded? Have you ever felt threatened or angered by the entrance of an outsider?

Read Acts 26:1-31

Journal Prompt (5 minutes)

What do you think it felt like for Paul’s eyes to be so radically opened that he was able to

move from religious outrage toward Jesus and the church to miraculously seeing and celebrating the scandal of Christ? What part of your own life testimony involves this kind of radical conversion, and how have you seen your own story stir wonder and awe in others?

Read Acts 28:17-31

Journal Prompt (5 minutes)

Have you ever been able to witness to “the hope of Israel” (v20), “the kingdom of God” (v24), “God’s salvation” (v28), and “the Lord Jesus Christ” (v31) to others? Who seems to be drawn to such a message, and who in your life seems to be calloused or closed off? What is your deepest hope and prayer for these people?

Small Group Discussion (15 mins)

What passage or prompt affected you the most? Where did you feel surprised or challenged, encouraged or tender?

Recall the last stanza of Hopkins’ poem:

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

“Brooding over the bent world with warm breast and bright wings” suggests God’s Holy Spirit at work in the very messed-up world and people around us. Are there any ways that you have failed to notice God at work in these ways?

Closing Prayer