

# grow deep

The Acts Edition

And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved

-Acts 2:47

# **Grow Deep Acts Edition**

"In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do..." (Acts 1:1)

Sequels have attracted generations in literature and media. Great stories remain unfinished and invite us back for more.



Jesus is the "sequel" to the Divine Drama of the Old Testament. His life, death and resurrection liberates the creation and rescues us from the curse of our sins. Jesus is, however, not just the sequel, He is the center of a great trilogy that awaits our participation in the final act.

The Book of Acts is the opening act of the final days. It describes what happens after Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Jesus is only seen in the first chapter, but He's at work on every page. The work of Jesus is multiplying and growing in the lives of His followers. They will be called by many names, but one name endures to this day: Church. The "Church" is not a building, a religious group or worship service. The "Church" is people who belong to Jesus. They are people "called out" to live as Jesus' witnesses. They carry on the story by inviting others to know Jesus and eternal life with Him.

Reading the Book of Acts is exciting, and the ending to the story of Acts is intentionally left unfinished. This final movement is our story. Through trial and conflict, gathering and scattering, from every nation and every person, Jesus is still growing His Church. Read yourself into this book. This story inspires courageous living. It challenges you to evaluate what you're living for. You are the Book of Acts today. Through your story, Jesus is growing His Church and adding to His number daily "those who are being saved." (Acts 2:47)

Grow Deep with Jesus!

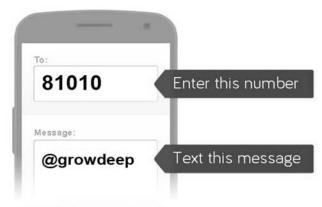
The Lutheran Church of Webster Gardens Pastors Joel Christiansen, Brian King, and Bill Geis April 2015

#### **Grow Deep Daily Reminder**

From April 6 through May 30, Webster Gardens is providing daily text messages to support your Grow Deep reading plan. You'll receive one text message each morning with the reading for the day, a link to read the verse online and a reflection thought or question to encourage you to Grow Deep with the Book of Acts. More than 200 people are already participating in our Grow Deep text messages. It's a great way to grow deep together.

Here's how to sign up with your cell phone.

To receive messages via text, text @growdeep to 81010. You can opt-out of messages at anytime by replying, 'unsubscribe@growdeep'.



Standard text message rates apply.

# Grow Deep with A.D. The Bible Continues...

NBC TV will air a 12 week TV series "A.D. The Bible Continues." based on the first ten chapters of the Book of Acts. It



airs Sunday nights at 8:00 p.m. beginning Easter Sunday.

Beginning Sunday, April 12, Webster Gardens will host "A.D. Community Nights." from 5:00-7:00 p.m. We'll serve a light supper and snacks while having a special showing of A.D. in North Classrooms A and B. Share this book and invitation with friends and neighbors. These will be informal, intergenerational evenings where we can share and participate in the Acts story together.

#### The Spirit Grows the Church

Week 1 (April 5-11)
Acts chapters 1 through 4:31

Acts is a historically accurate book that spans 30 years beginning with the post resurrection of Jesus. Matthias is chosen as an apostle to take the place of Judas and then covers the teachings of Peter. Peter's focus was to be bold when speaking of Jesus, even if it results in being arrested. This boldness created so many teachable moments to scores of people, miracles were performed, and bodies were filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. How is the Church called to be bold today? How are you called to be bold? Where does the Holy Spirit provide teachable moments for us to share the Gospel of Jesus?

## **Daily Readings**

Saturday:

Monday:

Can you be patient and wait for the Holy Spirit?

Tuesday:

Perfect name for an apostle: Matthias, meaning "Gift of the Lord."

Wednesday:

Perfect teachable moment: All OT prophecies do come true.

Thursday:

Acts 2:1-21

Precious gifts given: forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit.

Friday:

Acts 3:1-26

Jesus' healing and forgiveness is much better than silver or gold.

Are you bold enough to pray the Believer's Prayer?

Acts 4:1-31

#### The Church Grows Through Trials

Week 2: (April 12-18)

Acts chapters 4:32 through 7

Acts continues to give the history of Peter as the leader of the apostles. Peter gives good and bad examples of what it means to live for Jesus. Because the apostles live so boldly in proclaiming Jesus as Savior, they are persecuted and eventually martyred. Gamaliel initially convinces the Sanhedrin not to prosecute, stating that no matter what they do, it will either all blow over or they themselves will be fighting against God. As the disciples' numbers increased, the apostles realized that their followers needed to be taken care of. So they chose seven who were filled with the Spirit and with wisdom. This also brought other types of followers who did not agree with the teachers and lied about them. Therefore, Stephen was arrested and martyred. What trials prevent the Church from growing today? How can we encourage one another to lay everything down for the sake of our mission as Jesus' witnesses in the world?

## **Daily Readings**

Monday: Acts 4:32-5:16

How do you show your devotion to Jesus and the Holy Spirit?

Tuesday: Acts 5:17-42

Devotion to Jesus may come with suffering and persecution.

Wednesday: Acts 6:1-15

Seven new leaders are chosen in a time of conflict.

Thursday: Acts 7:1-16

Stephen preaches about Jesus through Abraham's story.

Friday: Acts 7:17-36

Stephen preaches about Jesus through Moses' story.

Saturday: Acts 7:37-60 Stephen insults the Sanhedrin and became the first Christian martyr.

#### The Church Grows As It Scatters

Week 3 (April 19-25) Acts chapters 8 through 10

One would think that persecution for one's faith would cause people to go into hiding. But as we will see in this week's readings, Christians took their faith with them as they scattered. They boldly told the story of Jesus Christ. Watch for the Holy Spirit at work in people and places you wouldn't expect: in Samaria, of all places; among those baptized in the name of Jesus; and most amazingly, in the life of Saul, the persecutor of Christians. See the Spirit working in the life of Peter, who, like Saul, had a life-changing experience of his own.

## **Daily Readings**

Tuesday:

Monday: Acts 8:1-25 See the power of the Holy Spirit to change people.

See the power of the Word in making Jesus real for the Ethiopian.

Acts 8:26-40

Wednesday: Acts 9:1-19

No one could have imagined that Saul could be converted.

Thursday: Acts 9:20-43

If you saw this transformation, would you have believed it?

Friday: Acts 10:1-23

How is Peter's vision as life-changing as Paul's?

Saturday: Acts 10:24-48

God's plan for Gentiles to be part of the Church becomes clear.

#### The Church Grows Among the Gentiles

Week 4: (April 26-May 2) Acts chapters 11 through 14

As we just saw in our readings last week, faithful Jews were not sure if non-Jews were to become believers. Nowadays we would laugh at such a thought. But for them, it was a serious matter. Even Peter had to defend his belief that God intended salvation to be for all—Jew and Gentile alike. With that understanding, the Gospel began to be preached to a much wider audience, including people outside the region and in front of rulers and kings. Pay close attention to the magnificent sermon preached by Paul and how he uses God's Word skillfully to make his points.

## **Daily Readings**

Monday: Acts 11:1-18 Empowered by the Spirit, Peter defends preaching Jesus to Gentiles.

Tuesday: Acts 11:19-30

The church in Antioch was formed, and a leader was put into place.

Wednesday: Acts 12:1-25

God intervenes to rescue the Church from new persecutions.

Thursday: Acts 13:1-12

Paul and Barnabas sent as missionaries from the church at Antioch.

Friday: Acts 13:13-52

Paul and Barnabas preach Jesus to Jews and Gentiles.

Saturday: Acts 14:1-28

You may not be well-received every time you share your faith.

#### The Church Grows Through Conflict

Week 5 (May 3-9) Acts chapters 15 through 17

The conflict is coming to a head between those who wanted the Gospel preached only to Jews and the apostles who understood the Gospel should be freely preached to all. The congregations called for church officials in Jerusalem to arrive at a conclusion. Note how the discussion proceeds according to God's agenda, and comes to a workable result. But even with a decision, internal conflicts persist. Watch for the highs and lows in the experience of the apostles as they preach the Gospel on their journey.

## **Daily Readings**

Monday: Acts 15:1-21

Observe how this six-item agenda of decision-making works.

Tuesday: Acts 15:22-41 Sometimes not all members of the Church agree on everything.

Wednesday: Acts 16:1-15

To whom is God calling you to share the Gospel?

Thursday: Acts 16:16-40

Sometimes our witness ends up offending people.

Friday: Acts 17-1-15

Trouble-makers try to stop the Gospel message but are thwarted.

Saturday: Acts 17:16-34

Paul explains who the unknown god is—the one and only true God.

#### The Church Grows with New Leaders

Week 6: (May 10-16) Acts chapters 18 through 20

> Paul's mission trips and writings headline a great deal of the New Testament. But don't miss the many names of leaders besides Paul. The Holy Spirit used Paul to make disciples of Jesus wherever he went. You'll meet Aguila and Priscilla, Apollos, Gaius and Aristarchus, the students in the lecture hall of Tyrannus and the Ephesian Elders. Even our author, Luke, has included himself among those next generation disciples as he writes with one simple word, "we" (see 20:6ff). Each of those disciples of Jesus taught others about Him. Paul was a great missionary because he made disciples who made other disciples. The church grew by names not even written in the book. It continues to grow today. Who are the people who taught you about Jesus? Who are you raising up as disciples and leaders?

## **Daily Readings**

Monday: Acts 18:1-17 Paul mentors fellow tent makers, Aguila and Priscilla in Corinth.

Tuesday: Acts 18:18-28

Aquila and Priscilla mentor Apollos at Ephesus.

Wednesday: Acts 19:1-22 Paul instructs many leaders and disciples around Ephesus.

Thursday:

Young leaders are saved from rioters in Ephesus.

Acts 19:23-41

Friday: Acts 20:1-12

Eutychus is raised to life during a midnight teaching service.

Saturday: Acts 20:13-38

Paul encourages, prays for and commissions leaders for Ephesus.

# The Church Grows As It Witnesses Before Kings

Week 7 (May 17-23)
Acts chapters 21 through 25

As Paul returns to Jerusalem, he senses he is headed into danger. The Holy Spirit has revealed these things to Paul and prepares Paul and those with him for the next growth move of Jesus' church. Luke, the author of Acts, tells the story of the growth of the church like Jesus' passion story. Like Jesus, Paul is rejected by his own people and taken into custody of Gentile authorities; yet, there are notable differences between the two stories. Jesus is silent and led to crucifixion; He is our Savior and sacrifice for sin. Paul is Jesus' witness to advance the message to the highest levels of government and to the ends of the empire. Jesus promised this would happen. He said, "They will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name." (Luke 21:12).

## **Daily Readings**

Monday: Acts 21:1-26

The Spirit reveals Paul's arrest and trials ahead.

Tuesday: Acts 21:27 - 22:21

Paul is arrested and shares his story with the crowd.

Wednesday: Acts 22:22 - 23:11

Paul testifies before Jewish leaders. The Lord reveals he will also testify in Rome.

Thursday: Acts 23:12-35

Paul is rescued and transferred to the Governor's custody.

Friday: Acts 24:1-27

Paul testifies of his faith before Governor Felix.

Saturday: Acts 25:1-12

Paul testifies before Governor Festus and King Agrippa.

#### The Church Grows in Uncharted Waters

Week 8: (May 24-30) Acts chapters 25:13 through 28

The Holy Spirit has no boundaries. Since it is this Spirit which leads and drives the Church—don't get too comfortable! There is no limit to what the Holy Spirit can do through us when we trust in Him to take us to unchartered waters. But too often, we retreat when faced with obstacles. We give up when it seems nobody is listening. We choose the easier road to success in ministry rather than embrace a risky opportunity. Human reason and fear prevent us from stepping out into the deep waters. He calls us to rely on the power of His Holy Spirit to do miraculous work that changes lives for eternity. Paul's faith empowered Him to spread the Gospel in spite of chains, snakes, shipwrecks and ridicule. And the Church grew! How will the Spirit use us, regardless of any obstacles we face, to enlarge His Church today?

## **Daily Readings**

Monday: Acts 25:13-27

Paul's choice to stand before Caesar broadens his witness.

Tuesday: Acts 26:1-32

Whether time is short or long, pray the Gospel will change lives.

Wednesday: Acts 27:1-12

God is at work, even when it seems nobody is listening.

Thursday: Acts 27:13-44

When things look bleak, Jesus has a message of hope for us to deliver.

Friday: Acts 28:1-15

Chains can't curb Paul's testimony, nor can any obstacle hinder ours.

Saturday: Acts 28:16-31

No matter the circumstances, expect the Spirit to work through you!

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The Lutheran Church of Webster Gardens