

## **A Task Unfinished**

Acts 1:1-5

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### **Play Gospel Project Video: Acts**

BTW, a longer version of this video covering the first half of the Book of Acts is available on the “Sermon Extras” tab on the Edgewood app or website. If you don’t have Right Now Media, you’ll need to sign up for your free account.

Shortly after we moved here six years ago, our daughter Megan and I went for a drive. Beth was out of town and Megan’s older sisters were living in other places. We were both feeling a bit down so I thought a drive would be helpful. We had no plan; just jumped in our trusty Cobalt and headed east. As we meandered down roads we stopped at various destinations – one place was shady (a Pawn Shop), one was boring (a museum) another place was fun (an apple orchard) and one was a blast (we both got Harvest Chippers at Whitey’s). But since we didn’t have a plan we really weren’t sure of our destination.

It’s so easy in life to just start driving without any sense of where we’re headed. Without a plan we can move from shady to boring to fun to exciting...but we ended up going nowhere.

We’re beginning a road trip in a book of the Bible that describes God’s unfolding plan of God.

I’m often asked how I pick different sermon series. In simple terms, I listen to the Lord and look at what our church needs related to our gather, grow, give and go values. Our recent summer series called “Glad You Asked” was designed to equip us to give biblical answers to unbelievers who ask about our beliefs. In that sense, it had both evangelistic and apologetic elements to it, which helped shore up both our “grow and go” values. All 18 sermons are available on the Edgewood app.

Our “Laboring in Prayer” services last weekend came about when a group of people wanted to have a “concert of prayer.” Sensing the need for all of us to pray more, we decided to incorporate intercession into each of our services on Labor Day weekend. This enabled us to give attention to our “gather and give” values as we focused on offering ourselves to the Lord.

As I prayed about where God wanted us to focus this fall, I kept coming back to the Book of Acts. While we're excited about all the facility changes taking place, we need to remember Grow Time is all about growing our faith, our family and our future for the glory of God. We must remain on mission by focusing outwardly, not inwardly. I thought it would be good for us to go back to what the church is all about.

We're calling this series, "On Mission," because we need to be constantly reminded of our purpose and of God's plan to reach the world through His witnesses. BTW, "On Mission" is the name of our Sunday preaching program heard on Moody Radio (WDLM) twice on Sundays – at 11:00 am and 7:30 pm. I want to give John Gunther a shout-out for his outstanding editing and production work. I marvel at how he can take a 45-minute sermon and turn it into a 23-minute message (some of you wish he would do that for our weekend services). Here's part of the introduction for each episode: *"Welcome to On Mission. My name is Pastor Brian from Edgewood. When we gather together we meet on 38<sup>th</sup> Street in Rock Island and when we're scattered, we strive to live on mission all over the Quad Cities area."*

With all the construction going on, I've heard a few people wonder if we're trying to become a mega-church. I want to answer that as clearly as I can. Our goal is to bring glory to God by going with the gospel to our neighbors and to the nations. I want us to reach and teach more people not because we're trying to be big, but because God is big. We want to be a mission-church, not a mega-church. This project is all about maximizing our space for ministry purposes. Our facility is not the focus; it's simply a tool to train more disciples to live on mission for the glory of God. Buildings don't change lives but what happens inside them does. Once we're changed, we're to take the gospel outside these walls to those who need to know Jesus.

While this book is known as, *"The Acts of the Apostles,"* I prefer a more descriptive title: *"The Acts of Jesus Christ through His church by the power of the Holy Spirit."* The word "Acts" comes from the Greek word *praxis*, used to describe the deeds and incredible actions of Christ-followers. As we will see, Acts is a book of action.

It's helpful to get an overview of a Bible book before jumping into it. Let's start with a very helpful chart developed by Chuck Swindoll.

# ACTS

	<b>The Church Established at "Jerusalem"</b> The church is . . . born tested purified strengthened CHAPTERS 1-7	<b>The Church Enlarged to "Judea and Samaria"</b> The gospel is . . . spreading multiplying changing lives breaking traditions CHAPTERS 8-12	<b>The Church Expanded to "the Ends of the Earth"</b> The witness is . . . extended received and rejected changing lives unifying Jews and Gentiles CHAPTERS 13-28
AD 30			AD 60
<b>Leaders</b>	The apostle Peter		The apostle Paul
<b>Emphasis</b>	Jewish evangelism	Transition	Gentile evangelism
<b>Time</b>	AD 33 (1:1-2:47)	AD 36 (8:1)      AD 40 (9:32)	AD 46 (13:1)      AD 57 (21:18)
<b>Scope</b>	City evangelism	National evangelism	Cross-cultural evangelism
<b>Theme</b>	In the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus's followers carry the good news of Christ to the world.		
<b>Key Verse</b>	1:8		
<b>Christ in Acts</b>	Jesus is the glorified, enthroned Savior, who continues His ministry in the world by means of the Holy Spirit working through His disciples until He returns (1:7-9).		

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I wrote down 10 reasons the Book of Acts is so engaging and applicable to us.

1. **A Bridge.** Imagine what it would be like if Acts wasn't in the Bible. We would have no context for the letters written by Paul, Peter and John and we would have no clue how the gospel made it from Jerusalem to Rome. Acts serves as a bridge between the Gospels and the Epistles. The Gospels focus on what Jesus did while He was on earth and Acts explains how the Holy Spirit continues Jesus' work in and through His church. The Ascension of Jesus marks the turning point in the history of the world, for when Jesus went up, the Holy Spirit came down.
  
2. **A Transition.** For thousands of years, God dealt almost exclusively with Israel but in Acts we see how the good news of the gospel moves from the Jewish nation to the Gentile nations. The worship of God transitions from the Jewish temple, to the hesitant acceptance of Gentiles into the Jewish church, and finally to predominately Gentile churches all over the Roman Empire. While sitting in a prison in the capital of the Roman empire, Paul makes this statement near the end of the Book of Acts in Acts 28:28:  
*"Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen."*

3. **A History.** Christianity is an historical faith, grounded in fact and fleshed out through real people in real places. As such, it is anything but dry and boring. The Logos website offers this insight: *“Most ancient books trace the ‘acts’ of heroes like Alexander the Great or Julius Caesar. Luke is unique because these are the ‘acts’ of a movement.”*
  
4. **A Foundation.** The Book of Acts is filled with doctrine and duty. For instance, all three members of the Trinity are found in the first five verses. We learn in Acts 4:12 there is no other way to be saved but through Jesus *“for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”* Also we see the primacy of prayer and preaching. Speaking of preaching, we’re introduced to a guy named Eutychus in Acts 20:7-12. The Apostle Paul was so long-winded he fell asleep and fell out an open window and died. Paul brought him back to life and continued preaching until morning!
  
5. **A Birthday.** In Matthew 16:18, Jesus made this promise: *“I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”* Acts 2 describes how the church began on the Day of Pentecost. I spent some time earlier in the summer reflecting on how Edgewood must become more like the church described verses 42-43: *“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul...”* I pray God will bring awe to every soul as we live sold-out lives to Christ and to each other.
  
6. **A Force.** Acts is an account of evangelism whereby people through the power of the Holy Spirit literally changed the world. I like this definition: *“Evangelism is doing normal life with gospel intentionality.”* Those opposed to the gospel said this about Christians in Acts 17:6: *“These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also.”* It’s fascinating that 110 people are mentioned by name in Acts, showing how God gets His message out through ordinary believers as they live on mission for Him. It’s stunning when you consider how a group of uneducated apostles, made up of fishermen and tax collectors, had so much courage to communicate the gospel. That’s what we read in Acts 4:13: *“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.”*

I'm reminded of what Billy Graham often said, *"If the church went back to its main task of preaching the gospel and getting people converted to Christ, it would have far more impact on the social structure of the nation than...any other thing it could possibly do."* This outward thrust of the gospel is the main story line of Acts because the mandate for missions permeates the entire book.

7. **A Guide.** We will learn together what God wants us to focus on as a church and as individual Christians through our journey in Acts. We will see how basic principles were applied to specific situations in the context of problems and persecutions. We'll find it refreshing to see what God can do through a group of people fully devoted to Him. Related to this, I've been stirred by something David Platt said recently: *"I want to prepare people to be so confident in the Spirit of God in us and the Word of God in front of us to make disciples and multiply churches wherever God leads us in the world without relying on performances, programs, and professionals."*
8. **A Challenge.** When you think about it, our culture has become increasingly pagan and more opposed to biblical Christianity, much like the first century when morality was maligned, babies were sacrificed, idols were worshipped, Christians were oppressed...and the church exploded with growth! As we study this book, we will see both the early church's trials and triumphs and learn that Christianity grows fastest when faced with persecution. May our response be like Peter and John's when they were told to stop preaching in Acts 4:20, *"For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard!"* We must be bold and not fold when hard times come.
9. **A Defense.** Acts shows us how to defend the Christian faith before Jews in Acts 4:8-12 and in front of Gentiles in Acts 25:8-11. In short we must declare a bold witness and demonstrate a visible love. One of my favorite chapters in the Bible is Acts 17:16-34 because it shows how Paul presented the gospel to pluralistic pagans. He started by being courteous and then connected with the contemporary culture. Next, he courageously presented Christ and called for a commitment for all to repent and receive Christ.
10. **A Mission.** While the good news of the gospel spread throughout Jerusalem, it extended to different cultures, languages, and people groups. People from every walk of life and every racial background were saved and enfolded into the ever-expanding church (Acts 1:8). At its core, Acts is a

book about each of us living on mission among our neighbors *and* sending missionaries to the nations. It would be great if God would call some of us to become cross-cultural missionaries through this series.

Open your Bibles or click on [Acts 1:1-5](#) in your app: ***“In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, ‘you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’”***

Here’s the main thrust of the opening verses in Acts: *We have all we need to finish the task in front of us.* I see three challenges for us.

**1. Join Jesus and keep working (1-2).** [Acts 1:1](#) sounds very similar to [Luke 1:3](#): ***“It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus.”***

Luke, a respected doctor, was personally acquainted with firsthand witnesses. [Colossians 4:14](#) refers to him as ***“the beloved physician.”*** As we work our way through Acts, we’ll see him use the pronouns “we” or “us” to show he had a front row seat to all the action.

Its likely Theophilus was a distinguished dignitary because government officials like Felix and Festus were given the same ***“most excellent”*** title in [Acts 23:26](#) and [Acts 26:25](#). His name means, “*God-lover*” or “*friend of God.*”

The Book of Acts is really the sequel to the Gospel of Luke. We see this in the second half of [verse 1](#): ***“...I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach.”*** If the Gospel of Luke records what Jesus *began* to do and teach in His human body, Acts records what Jesus *continued* to do by the Holy Spirit through His spiritual body, the church. The word ***“began”*** implies that His work is continuing in the Book of Acts and beyond, through the actions of His followers today.

I’ve been asking myself this question recently: *What if the best days for Edgewood lie ahead of us, not behind us?* [Deuteronomy 3:24](#) says, ***“O Lord GOD, you have***

*only begun to show your servant your greatness and your mighty hand. For what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do such works and mighty acts as yours?”*

Let's be clear. Jesus finished His work of salvation, but His work of building His church continues. In short, we are to continue what Jesus began to do and teach through our lips and lives as we show how the gospel saves and transforms today. Jesus said it like this in John 14:12: *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.”*

Verse 2 records the turning point in the Gospels and Acts, which is more fully developed in verses 9-11: *“Until the day when He was taken up...”* Jesus has ascended into Heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of the Father.

Before He ascended, He spelled out some clear commands: *“...After He had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen.”* In order to make sure His followers knew what He wanted them to do, Jesus commissioned them with some orders. We'll uncover these commands through our study in the months to come. Let me clarify. We need to stop doing things *for* Jesus and begin letting Him do things *through* us. Ian Thomas captured it this way: *“I can't – He never said I could; He can – He always said He would.”*

Because *we have all we need to finish the task in front of us*, we must join Jesus and keep working.

**2. Ponder the proof and keep worshipping (3).** Look at verse 3: *“He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.*

The word **“presented”** has the idea of placing beside or standing near. We know Jesus appeared on at least ten different occasions to more than 500 people over the course of 40 days to prove He was alive. The phrase **“many proofs”** means, *“much infallible and demonstrable evidence”* and was used in other literature to communicate the *“strongest proof of which a subject is susceptible”* involving hearing, sight and touch. One example is found in Luke 24:39: *“See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”*

It's very interesting once the disciples were convinced of the Resurrection; they never doubted it again. Some time ago, as part of a fascinating study, I read through Acts and put the letter "R" in the margin for every verse that mentioned the Resurrection. In almost every chapter, the reality of the resurrection is central. I counted seven examples in just the first three chapters!

Listen. If your default is doubt, come back to the resurrection of Christ. If Jesus was raised from the dead, you don't ever have to doubt again. If He didn't rise from the dead as 1 Corinthians 15:14 says, your ***"faith is in vain."***

Because we *have all we need to finish the task in front of us*, let's join Jesus and keep working and let's ponder the proof and keep worshipping. The third command is a bit unexpected. You would think Jesus would want us to jump into immediate action. But we're brought up short because we won't be able to work or worship unless we wait for the power of the Holy Spirit.

**3. Submit to the Spirit and keep waiting (4-5).** Look at verses 4-5: ***"And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, 'you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'"***

The phrase, ***"staying with them"*** can be interpreted as *"eating (salt) with,"* which is an idiom for table fellowship or sharing a meal together. The word ***"ordered"*** is a strong verb with the idea of binding the believers to stay in Jerusalem.

I wonder if it was hard for the disciples to wait in Jerusalem. Most of them were from the Galilee region and they probably wanted to head home. On top of that, all the events related to the arrest and crucifixion had just happened in Jerusalem and there was an accusation the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus. Since Jesus was arrested and killed, why wouldn't the authorities do the same to His followers?

To ***"wait"*** means to pause in one place, and stay there with anticipation. The tense helps us see we're to *"keep on waiting."* We're not good waiters, are we? On a personal note, Beth and I are waiting for our granddaughter to be born to Matt and Emily any day now.

According to a new survey of 2,000 adults, the luxuries of life have made most people incredibly impatient. The survey revealed we become frustrated after just

16 seconds of waiting for a web page to load and we're ready to race our engines after 25 seconds of waiting for a traffic light to change. 38% lose their patience when trying to take notes while a speaker is talking. BTW, we do have sermon note sheets at Guest Services and have made more space on the back of the bulletin. You can also take notes right on the app.

The disciples were to wait for the ***“promise of the Father,”*** which is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit because without Him they were powerless to proclaim the gospel. I want us to see a remarkable truth taught by Jesus in John 16:7 - ***“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”*** The word ***“nevertheless”*** is used as a contrast or antithesis to what the disciples were feeling. Then Jesus says something to get their attention: ***“I tell you the truth...”*** Jesus always told the truth but it's as if He's saying, *“Listen up guys. This is really important.”*

What He says next is shocking: ***“it is to your advantage that I go away...”*** This word means, *“useful, profitable or beneficial.”* There was no way the disciples were thinking it was a good thing for Jesus to leave them. How could it be to their advantage for Jesus to leave? What benefit would there be for Jesus to be away from them?

Jesus tells them why His departure would be profitable: ***“for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you.”*** Three times Jesus uses the word, ***“go”*** to help the disciples understand He was about to leave them. But it would be to their advantage because then the Helper could arrive. His going is essential to the Spirit's coming. To ***“send”*** means, *“to dispatch and thrust out.”* Having God *in* us is even more precious than having God *with* us.

Here's a good question to ponder. Would you rather have Jesus right next to you or have the Holy Spirit within you? Jesus says it's to our benefit for Him to go away so the Spirit could dwell inside us. J.D. Greear writes: *“When Jesus was on earth, His miraculous work was contained to wherever He was at the moment. Now that He is in us, His power is wherever we are. The Spirit inside us is better than Jesus beside us...”*

The Holy Spirit appears by name over 50 times in the Book of Acts. I'm reminded the key is not to rely in our own strength but on the Spirit of God as Zechariah 4:6 says: ***“Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.”***

This isn't the first time the disciples heard about the necessity of waiting for the Holy Spirit before they were to start witnessing. We see this in Luke 24:48-49: ***“You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father [the Holy Spirit] upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”***

I'm sure the command to wait was shocking to the disciples. They're told not to do anything until the Holy Spirit comes. One pastor summarized it well: *“When God wants to reach the world, His first step is to tell His people to slow down and wait for Him. When the time comes, He'll give them the signal to move out. Until then, stay in Jerusalem and wait.”*

Waiting tests our faith, doesn't it? Jesus told them *what* to do – to wait. He told them *where* to do it – Jerusalem. And He told them *who* to wait for – the coming of the Holy Spirit. They had no idea how long they had to wait. To be ***“baptized with the Holy Spirit”*** has the idea of being immersed and united with Him.

Let's summarize the journey we've been on today. *Because we have all we need to finish the task in front of us...*

- Join Jesus and keep working
- Ponder the proof and keep worshipping
- Submit to the Spirit and keep waiting

Every two weeks a group of Edgewood leaders meet with the Aspen team to get a construction update. We receive a report on what's been finished and what's happening next. For the past couple months, I've been asking the same question every time we get together: *“Are we still on schedule to be finished so we can have our services in the worship center in October?”* As far as I know, that's still the plan. However, because we want to make sure everything's ready, we're looking at later in October for our first services.

It hit me this week that even though our facility will be finished soon, our task remains unfinished. Next weekend we'll spend the entire message fleshing out some specific action steps as part of a strategy to help us finish faithfully. We're

calling the sermon, “BLESS and Be Blessed.” We must follow God’s plan or else we’ll just drive around aimlessly.

Three years ago we joined churches around the world for a global hymn sing on the same weekend. Over one million people from 100 countries in 5,000 churches worshipped together in 11 languages to sing, “Facing a Task Unfinished.”

We’re going to play a video of this song as we close. Will you respond to God’s call to do whatever it takes to face and finish the task before us?

**Closing Video: “Facing a Task Unfinished”**

Saturday Night New Member – Kim Zude

Saturday Night Snacks