

**CHRONOLOGICAL
BIBLE
STORYING**

BOOK of Acts

**LEADERSHIP
GUIDE**

**Stories and Lessons
to match Acts Storying cloth**

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STORIES and LESSONS

1. The Ascension of Jesus Christ

Acts 1: 1-11, Luke 24:52

At the beginning of the book of Acts, Luke, the physician and companion of Paul, told his friend named Theophilus that in his first book he wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up to heaven.

Now after Jesus was crucified and resurrected, he had shown himself to these men and given many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. There are two particular appearances we want to mention.

On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

On a second occasion the apostles asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, suddenly, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into Heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." The disciples worshiped Jesus and then returned to Jerusalem with great joy and awaited the promised Holy Spirit.

INTRODUCTION: (Ask a pre-story question to discuss in pairs or as a group.)

- Do you ever worry about anything in your life? Think of a time when you were unsure of what would happen in your life. How did you feel? (Maybe you were scared or afraid?)

THE STORY: Tell the story and learn it together as a group through many repetitions.

POST-STORY DISCUSSION: Lead a discussion guided by these questions:

OUTLINE VERSION (for teacher to use when teaching)

Details: What happened? To see what truths we can learn.

- How does Luke introduce the book of Acts?
 - What do the words, “do” and “teach” show us about Jesus and his ministry?
- So what does Luke say happened between when Jesus’ resurrection and when he ascended to heaven? 1) List each occurrence and 2) tell why it is important to the early church and even to us.
- Why do you think they were asking about the Kingdom of God? What kind of kingdom do you think they were expecting?
 - How did Jesus’ response improve their understanding of the kind of kingdom they should expect? What promise did he give them that would impact this kingdom?
- What were the promises Jesus made to his followers? How can these encourage us?
 - How can we be sure we are effective witnesses?
- Jesus’ ascension into heaven. How would the disciples have felt in the moment? How would this help strengthen the early church?

Summary: Commandments or examples?

- Do not leave Jerusalem. Wait for the gift of the promised Holy Spirit.
- Be my witnesses in 1) Jerusalem 2) Judea & Samaria, 3) Ends of earth.
 - What is a WITNESS?
- Trust in the fact that Jesus is coming again!
- Do and teach!

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

- The story spoke of how the ministry of Jesus was teaching (speaking) and doing (deeds). He also promised the disciples, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses . . .” In light of this information, how do you think our churches today could improve our witness? In believing? In speaking? In doing?

Personal Application:

- How do you want to improve in both doing and speaking as a witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ? How can the good news be comforting even when we fail, to know that we are forgiven and can continue to be witnesses because we worship a risen and ascended Savior?

FULL VERSION (for teacher to use for study in preparation)

Let's look at the details that we observe describing what happened in the story in order to see what truths we can learn.

- **How does Luke introduce the book of Acts?**
 - Told them that this was the second of two books and that in the first one he told all about how Jesus had begun to do and teach things during his ministry before he died and was raised to life, and that through the Holy Spirit he had given commands before he ascended to the chosen apostles.
 - Then he explains some of what happened between Jesus' resurrection and his ascension.
 - **What do the words, "do" and "teach" show us about Jesus and his ministry?**
 - The ministry of Jesus was a ministry of both word and deed.

- **So what does Luke say happened between when Jesus' resurrection and when he ascended to heaven? 1) List each occurrence and 2) tell why it is important to the early church and even to us.**
 - Jesus showed himself, gave many convincing proofs of being alive, and appeared repeatedly for forty days - -
 - He proved his resurrection over and over. He knows our weaknesses and tendency to doubt.
 - He needed to reassure the disciples in their doubts
 - Jesus is a risen Savior. We worship a living God.
 - He spoke about the kingdom of God -
 - never stopped teaching. The new life is a kingdom with a king who rules and cares for his kingdom and its purposes
 - He ate with them -
 - did real life with them, showed his full risen humanity, spent time
 - He commanded them
 - to not leave Jerusalem
 - should not go off in your own power and confidence.
 - but wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit that the Father promised them. Promised they would be "baptized" with the Holy Spirit
 - The Spirit would empower them
 - Apostles asked about when the kingdom of Israel would be restored.
 - Jesus responded with a warning and a great promise.
 - **Why do you think they were asking about the Kingdom of God? What kind of kingdom do you think they were expecting?**
 - They expected a return to the old nation of Israel on earth with Jesus in charge and them helping him.
 - **How did Jesus' response improve their understanding of the kind of kingdom they should expect? What promise did he give them that would impact this kingdom?**
 - They were focused on the wrong thing. Jesus wants them to focus on trusting God and his timing and on being faithful to his commands and growing the kind of kingdom He wants.

- Jesus is the one who began it and completed it. The gospel and church is about what Jesus has done, and not what we have done.
- **What were the promises Jesus made to his followers? How can these encourage us?**
 - Will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on them.
 - The power for kingdom comes from the Spirit. We do not need to work in our own strength.
 - The Spirit is the power behind the church!
 - Will be his witnesses locally, regionally, all over the world.
 - When we repent, believe, and are saved, we are automatically his witnesses.
 - **How can we be sure we are effective witnesses?**
 - **How can we as a church more effectively testify to our neighbors? To the world?**
- Jesus' ascension into heaven. **How would the disciples have felt in the moment? How would this help strengthen the early church?**
 - They were eyewitnesses and could testify to the church. This would make his promises seem real - promises to be with them in the Holy Spirit, to empower them, to make them witnesses
 - The appearance of angels encouraged them with the promise of His return.
- They went back to Jerusalem and waited as Jesus commanded for his promise of the Holy Spirit to be fulfilled.

Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow are found in this story. Which ones still apply to us today?

- **Do not leave Jerusalem. Wait for the gift of the promised Holy Spirit.**
 - We obviously don't need to sit in Jerusalem! But the principle of waiting for the Holy Spirit to give us strength and guidance is very important for us today.
 - Rejoice that this is a promise! The Spirit is in every believer and is always ready to help us.
- **Be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.**
 - Our Jerusalem or Judea may be different from their's but the commandment is absolutely for the church today.
 - Jerusalem & Judea- our own home, church, or community
 - Begin where you are!!
 - Samaria- a place full of strangers, not our people..
 - The ends of the earth- all tribes, tongues, and nations.
 - **What is a WITNESS? How can the promise that we WILL be witnesses encourage us?**

- one who testifies to what he has seen, heard, and experienced
 - It does not say, “You will save people.” Even if we are not able to win arguments about faith, God promises to use our plain testimony. This takes the pressure off of us. We leave the job of saving to the Holy Spirit!
 - We are indeed witnesses. Are we satisfied to poor witnesses? It encourages us to better equip ourselves to be effective witnesses.
- **Trust in the fact that Jesus is coming again!**
 - This is so true for us now! It assures us that He is coming in strength and will crush the head of the serpent completely. The sting of death/the venom of the serpent has been taken away by his death and resurrection, but ultimately he will finish him and all his works completely when he returns. This allows the church to live in confidence and strength and not in fear.
- **Do and teach!**
 - This was the example of Jesus and still applies to us today. Our witness must be characterized by clear teaching of the Gospel of repentance and faith. It also must be characterized by deeds of love, holiness, and faithfulness that bear witness to the change Jesus has brought to our lives and to the love he has for the world.

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

- **The story spoke of how the ministry of Jesus was teaching (speaking) and doing (deeds). He also promised the disciples, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses . . .” In light of this information, how do you think our churches today could improve our witness? In believing? In speaking? In doing?**

Personal Application:

- **How do you want to improve in both doing and speaking as a witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ? How can the good news be comforting even when we fail, to know that we are forgiven and can continue to be witnesses because we worship a risen and ascended Savior?**

2-A. The Day of Pentecost

Acts 2:1-41

When the day of Pentecost arrived, the disciples were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues like fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? How is it that each of us hears him in his own native language telling the mighty words of God? And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, What does this mean? But others, mocking, said, "They are filled with new wine."

Peter then stood up and addressed the crowd that had gathered there in Jerusalem, saying, "They are not drunk! It is just the third hour of the morning." He then explained that this miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit was the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy when he declared that at the last days God would pour out His Spirit on all people. It would be a time when "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Peter said to them, "God had made Jesus, whom you crucified, to be both Lord and Messiah." He also told them that God raised him up from the dead. And that they were all witnesses.

Now when the people heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

So those who received his word were baptized, about 3,000 people that day.

INTRODUCTION: Ask a Pre-story question to the whole group or to discuss in pairs.

- Think of a time in your life that you have tried to minister or do something out of your own strength and did not rely on the Holy Spirit. Why do you think you did this? What was the result?

THE STORY: Tell the story and learn it together as a group through many repetitions.

POST-STORY DISCUSSION: Lead a discussion guided by these questions:

OUTLINE VERSION (for teacher to use when teaching)

Details: What happened? To see what truths we can learn.

- **It was the Jewish Day of Pentecost. Does anyone know what this day meant to the Jews of that day? Why would it be significant that the coming of the Holy Spirit on the church came that day?**
 - An Old Testament harvest festival and a celebration of the giving of the Law to Moses
- **Where were the believers on the Day of Pentecost after Jesus ascended to heaven? What happened?**
 - **What could these observations teach us about the Holy Spirit and how we experience His presence in our lives?**
- **Where do we observe the appearance of fire in the Old Testament? Considering these instances, why do you think God used fire to represent the Holy Spirit in this story?**
- **What did the disciples begin to do when they were filled with the Holy Spirit?**
- **No translator was needed and all languages were represented. Why is it important? How does it point back to something that went wrong in the Old Testament and show how Christ redeems?**
- **What did all the other Jews gathered in Jerusalem do when they heard this? What can we learn from their response?**
- **What did Peter do? How has he been changed? What has caused this change?**
- **What did he tell the crowd? List the things he said.**
 - **What truths do we learn from what Peter said?**
- **What was the people's response? What does this teach us about salvation? Or about evangelism?**

- **How did Peter answer them? Break down what he says and see what each part teaches us:**
- **3,000 souls received Peter's message and were baptized. What does this teach us about the work of the Spirit through the Word?**

Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow are found in this story. Which ones still apply to us today?

- **All believers receive the Holy Spirit.**
- At Pentecost people who had already been believers received the Spirit in a separate event from their salvation. **Does this mean that receiving (being baptized in) the Spirit is always a separate event from trusting Christ and receiving water baptism? Are there other Scriptures that can help us consider this?**
- When they received the Holy Spirit, they began speaking in other languages. **Does this mean we should expect anyone who receives the Spirit to speak in tongues? What does this teach about “tongues” as ecstatic languages?**
- **Repent and be baptized**, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins!
- The 3000 people believed and were immediately baptized after Peter told them, “Repent and be baptized.” **Does this mean that baptism should occur immediately upon belief? Or does it mean that a person is not truly saved until the moment he is baptized?**
- **Preach the Gospel to unbelievers**, just as Peter did.
- **Be empowered by the Spirit.** Depend on him!

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

- **How can this passage encourage us in evangelism?**

Personal Application:

- **Is there a person that God is calling you to share the truth of the Gospel with? Pray to the Holy Spirit to help you and to start working to soften their heart to receive the Gospel.**

FULL VERSION (for teacher to use for study in preparation)

Let's look at the details that we observe describing what happened in the story in order to see what truths we can learn.

- **It was the Jewish Day of Pentecost. Does anyone know what this day meant to the Jews of that day? Why would it be significant that the coming of the Holy Spirit on the church came that day?**
 - An Old Testament harvest festival and a celebration of the giving of the Law to Moses
 - Harvest Festival: Also known as the Feast of Weeks or Feast of Firstfruits, it was a harvest festival that celebrated the end of the barley harvest and the beginning of the wheat harvest.
 - Giving of the Law: It also commemorated the giving of the Ten Commandments by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, which was considered a celebration of the covenant between God and Israel.
 - It occurred 50 days after the Passover.
 - This story occurred 50 days after Jesus' resurrection
 - NT Significance: "The Spirit's coming is in continuity of God's purpose in giving of the law and yet ... the Spirit's coming signals the essential difference between the Jewish faith and commitment to Jesus...the former is Law-centered and Law-directed, the latter is Christ-centered and Spirit-directed."
- **Where were the believers on the Day of Pentecost after Jesus ascended to heaven? What happened?**
 - They were gathered together.
 - Suddenly a sound like a mighty rushing wind came down from heaven and filled the house.
 - Divided tongues like fire rested on each one of them.
 - They were filled with the Holy Spirit.
 - They begin speaking in different known languages.
 - **What could these observations teach us about the Holy Spirit and how we experience His presence in our lives?**
 - The Spirit was only present with believers in Jesus Christ.
 - They were gathered in prayer, expecting and hoping for the Spirit to come as Jesus had promised.
 - The Spirit comes from heaven, i.e. from God
 - Like wind, can't see it, is everywhere, is powerful.
 - Empowers people to speak God's truths and worship him.
- **Where do we observe the appearance of fire in the Old Testament? Considering these instances, why do you think God used fire to represent the Holy Spirit in this story?**
 - The pillar of fire that guided the Israelites and provided light for them.
 - God appeared as a flame of fire in Abraham's sacrifice. (Gen 15:17)
 - God appeared as fire in the burning bush (Exod. 3:16).
 - Fire appeared in the tabernacle shining as God's presence with his people.

- In the story of the Pentecost, the **flames represent the Presence of God** dwelling on and in each individual believer.
 - **Read these two Scriptures - Hebrews 12:29, 1 Cor. 6:19. How do they help our understanding of this truth? -**
 - God himself is described as a consuming fire. Fire purifies and cleanses sin.
 - Our bodies are “temples” or dwelling places for the Spirit, whom we've received from God.
- **What did the disciples begin to do when they were filled with the Holy Spirit?**
 - They began to speak in other tongues or languages. We observe that other people could understand them talking in their own language. This shows us that the tongues the apostles were talking about were known languages spoken by others.
- **No translator was needed and all languages were represented. Why is it important? How does it point back to something that went wrong in the Old Testament and show how Christ redeems?**
 - Gospel for all nations. The Spirit and the truth are available to all peoples and cultures.
 - Christ, through his spirit, is able to reverse the confused languages and division that occurred at the Tower of Babel. Jesus is the Curse Reverser!
- **What did all the other Jews gathered in Jerusalem do when they heard this? What can we learn from their response?**
 - They were astonished and confused to hear the Galileans speaking in their own native tongue. They did not understand what was happening.
 - Some were mocking.
 - Some hearts are softened to the Spirit's work. Others are hardened and resist.
- **What did Peter do? How has he been changed? What has caused this change?**
 - He now shows no fear of man and what they can do to him. He is bold and courageous and speaks about what he has seen and heard and observed. Peter is a different person now that he has **been filled with the Holy Spirit**. Just weeks before this he was denying Christ and now he is proclaiming Christ.
- **What did he tell the crowd? List the things he said.**
 - Not drunk but filled with the Spirit.
 - This Spirit outpouring fulfills prophecies of Joel about last days.
 - “All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved.”
 - Basics of the Gospel: Jesus, God-man, affirmed by miracles, killed by sinful men, raised from dead - as witnessed by many, is Lord and Messiah.
 - We are all to blame for Jesus' death. He died because of our sin.

- **What truths do we learn from what Peter said?**
 - God is fulfilling His purposes.
 - The Spirit is poured out on all believers.
 - Jesus accomplished this salvation through all that he did and all that happened to him - his sinless and righteous life, his crucifixion, and his resurrection. We know it is true because we saw it!
 - God's salvation is available for any who will call to Him through Jesus.

- **What was the people's response? What does this teach us about salvation? Or about evangelism?**
 - **They were "cut to the heart." "What shall we do?" What do these words teach us about the working of God's salvation in people?**
 - It is painful because it involves an honest look at sin and guilt.
 - It begins in the heart. Begins with giving up on ourselves and crying out for help in desperation.
 - The proclamation of God's word is important to help people understand and come to know Christ.
 - The Spirit is at work in people's hearts to convict them of sin and begin drawing them to Christ even before they are saved.

- **How did Peter answer them? Break down what he says and see what each part teaches us:**
 - Repent - confess and turn away from your sinful ways of believing, speaking, and acting
 - Be baptized - be washed clean, identify yourself with (publicly), believe/trust in , pledge allegiance to
 - Every one of you - each individual must respond to God's call
 - In the name of Jesus Christ - Jesus is the right object of our faith, our only hope, the source of our salvation.
 - For the forgiveness of sins - the promise of being made right with God, of a new relationship
 - You will receive the gift - it is not something we can earn. We receive - an act of trust
 - of the Holy Spirit - God the Spirit, the Helper, advocate that Jesus talked about in John 14. For every believer, received at the point of salvation.
 - The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off (Gentiles), all whom the Lord will call to himself (See Ephesians 2:11-13)

- **3,000 souls received Peter's message and were baptized. What does this teach us about the work of the Spirit through the Word?**
 - God was using this outpouring of the Spirit to start Christ's church with power, laying a foundation through heart change and through significant numbers of people responding to the Gospel.
 - The preaching of the message of the Gospel is a vital part of people being saved. People are saved as they believe and identify themselves with Jesus.

[OPTIONAL TEACHING] What does baptism in the name of Christ (or the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) mean? Why is it important?

- It is a sign and seal of God's promise to save us and make us part of his covenant people.
- It is a sign standing for a believer:
 - being cleansed and forgiven for his sins (Acts 2:38)
 - being regenerated (made new - born again) by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13)
 - being buried and raised together with Christ (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12)
 - being indwelt by the Holy Spirit - (1 Cor 12:13)
 - being adopted into the family of God (Gal 3:26,27)
 - being sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Col 2:6,7,11,12)

Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow are found in this story. Which ones still apply to us today?

- **Believers receive the Holy Spirit.** Peter says of those who repent and are baptized, "You will receive the Holy Spirit."
 - This is a **promise to all who believe for all time.**
 - He continues, "The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." Everyone who is called by the Lord and saved has the Holy Spirit.
- At Pentecost people who had already been believers received the Spirit in a separate event from their salvation. **Does this mean that receiving (being baptized in) the Spirit is always a separate event from trusting Christ and receiving water baptism? Are there other Scriptures that can help us consider this?**
 - No, Peter promises the listeners that when they repent and are baptized they will receive the spirit at that time and that's what happened. It was not a separate event.
 - Ephesians 1:13 - *In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit*
 - Note: We will say several times in Acts that people believed and were baptized but Spirit was not poured out on them at first. We will address this more in Lesson 10
- When they received the Holy Spirit, they began speaking in other languages. - **Does this mean we should expect anyone who receives the Spirit to speak in tongues? What does this teach about "tongues" as ecstatic languages?**
 - 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 teaches that gifts of the Spirit are distributed differently to each believer. This includes the gift of speaking in tongues.
 - The tongues here in Acts 2 are definitely real known human languages that people can understand, not ecstatic utterances.
- **Repent and be baptized,** each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins!

- This command **applies to each convicted sinner for all times.**
- The 3000 people believed and were immediately baptized after Peter told them, “Repent and be baptized.” **Does this mean that baptism should occur immediately upon belief? Or does it mean that a person is not truly saved until the moment he is baptized?**
 - Peter's command is for people convicted of sin to repent and be baptized in Jesus name to receive the forgiveness of our sins and the Holy Spirit. Elsewhere in Scripture are commands to be baptised.
 - Nowhere does it command specifically when baptism must happen.
 - Anyone who repents of their sin and trusts in Jesus is saved, even if baptism comes later. We are baptized out of obedience to God's commands, not to gain our salvation!
- **Preach the Gospel to unbelievers**, just as Peter did.
 - Yes, we are always called to preach the word of God, call people to repentance and faith for the forgiveness of sins, and call people to baptism.
- **Be empowered by the Spirit.** Depend on him!
 - This will always be true.

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

- **How can this passage encourage us in evangelism?**
 - It is the Spirit who works in hearts to call people to Christ.
 - My solid identity as a child of God can give me security and confidence to stand up and testify for him
 - Our evangelism must be based on the Word of God as rooted in the whole of the Old Testament as well as the New Testament.

Personal Application:

- **Is there a person that God is calling you to share the truth of the Gospel with? Pray to the Holy Spirit to help you and to start working to soften their heart to receive the Gospel.**

2-B. The Believer's Fellowship

Acts 2:42-47

Context:

With the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, Peter preached with the Holy Spirit's power. Many people repented and were baptized. One other thing that Peter said to them in warning was this. **“Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”**

- **How could these words, “Save yourselves from this present generation” help us understand this passage about the fellowship of the believers?**
 - A **“generation” is a whole culture. Each generation - has its own common characteristics of thinking & behavior..**
 - So the **main thing influencing their minds and hearts** must no longer be the spirit of the age, but spirit and truth of God.
 - **The church itself is a “new generation” — a whole new people**, a new culture. The church is supposed to show the world a whole new way of living as humans under the Lordship of Christ.

And this story is how the people in the early church, this “new generation,” lived together:

STORY:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

INTRODUCTION: Ask a Pre-story question to the whole group or to discuss in pairs.

- Think of a time in your life when you experienced a deep sense of fellowship with other believers. When did that happen? What made it so special?

THE STORY: Tell the story and learn it together as a group through many repetitions.

POST-STORY DISCUSSION: Lead a discussion guided by these questions:

OUTLINE VERSION (for teacher to use when teaching)

Details: What happened? To see what truths we can learn.

Focus on characteristics of a healthy church?

- **What happened just before this passage that displays what the church was founded on?**
 - Holy Spirit empowered response to the preaching of Gospel.
- **What was the basic attitude of the believers toward the fellowship?**
- **What in particular were the believers devoted to? How does this guide us toward healthy churches today?**
- **What was happening that affirmed that the Gospel being taught and believed was real? Why was this important in the early stages of Christ's church? How should this apply to our churches today?**
- **How did the church display a true sense of unity and faithfulness toward the fellowship? How can we learn from them?**
 - How does believing the Gospel deeply promote this sense of unity?
 - What characteristics of real fellowship should we find in a small group of devoted believers who are really walking together with the Lord?
- **How were believers feeling in the early? Where did this come from?**
- **It's very easy in our churches to become comfortable with our own group, with the people we like. How did the early church avoid this? How did they remain faithful to growth? What was the obvious fruit of their fellowship?**

Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow are found in this story. Which ones still apply to us today?

- **Signs and wonders guaranteed?**
- **Seek unity: Hope for great things from God:**
- **Build small groups:**

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

- Believers need to be in local fellowship - breaking of bread, praying, hearing and applying the teaching of God's word, and being generous with their resources.
Which of these ideas do people in our churches struggle with the most? How could this story encourage us?

Personal Application:

- **Which of these aspects of the early church do you struggle to live out the most? How can remembering that we have been forgiven help us to repent of this and allow the Holy Spirit to empower us to follow Christ in deeper and more trusting ways?**

FULL VERSION (for teacher to use for study in preparation)

Let's look at the details that we observe describing what happened in the story in order to see what truths we can learn.

What do we learn in this story about the early church?

What characteristics of a healthy church do we see?

- **What happened just before this passage that displays what the church was founded on?**
 - The church was led by Holy Spirit.
 - The church was built on a Holy Spirit empowered response to the preaching of Gospel of Jesus Christ leading repentance and faith.

Now, let's look at the main passage:

- **What was the basic attitude of the believers toward the fellowship?**
 - They were DEVOTED – a sense of whole hearted commitment to the whole process.
- **What in particular were the believers devoted to? How does this guide us toward healthy churches today?**
 - The **teaching of the apostles**. They were devoted to the Scriptures. Not just the prophetic word, but to apostolic explanation of the meaning of the Scriptures (ex. Peter's preaching).
 - The **fellowship**. They were committed to one another, to following this new life as a body or a family.
 - The **breaking of bread** (eating together and/or the Lord's Supper to remember Christ) Eating together builds community.
 - **Prayer** - should be at the heart of our fellowship
- **What was happening that affirmed that the Gospel being taught and believed was real? Why was this important in the early stages of Christ's church? How should this apply to our churches today?**
 - Wonders and signs were being performed by the apostles, those who had been together with Jesus.
 - These kind of signs from were especially common at important times of the establishment of the church to affirm God's presence.
 - They always were confirming the Word of God being taught. And the Word was always bringing glory to God.
 - While God does not promise to commonly work these kind of miraculous signs among us today, we should still have great hope and expectation that God will continue to act with power to grow his church.
 - It is important for us to be sensitive to the Spirit so that we recognize and praise God for the miraculous work he does in the hearts and lives of people - not just the external miracles like physical healing, but the major changes God works in hearts through the Gospel.

- **How did the church display a true sense of unity and faithfulness toward the fellowship? How can we learn from them?**
 - It says they were together and had everything in common shared their possessions. We should have a true concern for the needs of brothers and sisters and be willing to sacrifice ourselves in order to share our blessings.
 - Met daily, regularly, valued being together
 - Ate together in homes - share their food.
- **How does believing the Gospel deeply promote this sense of unity?**
 - The Gospel of grace tells us that we sinners are forgiven and made right through repenting and trusting in salvation through Christ who died for us and rose again. When we believe this more and more and rejoice in being God's children, the Spirit leads us to a growing humility in the way we relate to one another. We know that none of us deserves anything from the Lord so there is no boasting or self-centeredness. We are made able to truly serve each other with love. This leads to a growing unity.
- **What characteristics of real fellowship should we find in a small group of devoted believers who are really walking together with the Lord?**
 - Mutual sacrificial love and help for one another.
 - Openness with each about personal struggles. Confession of sin.
 - Trustworthiness and gentle accountability to encourage toward repentance and growth in holiness based on God's Word..
- **How were believers feeling in the early? Where did this come from?**
 - Sense of awe, expectation, and wonder
 - Sense of gladness and thanksgiving
 - Praising God
- **It's very easy in our churches to become comfortable with our own group, with the people we like. How did the early church avoid this? How did they remain faithful to growth? What was the obvious fruit of their fellowship?**
 - They enjoyed the favor of all the people, good reputation.
 - They welcomed seekers. They were obviously committed to spreading their witness and drawing others in.
 - They honored God with their praises.
 - The Lord added daily to their numbers those who were being saved!

Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow are found in this story. Which ones still apply to us today?

- **Signs and wonders?** Should the church today expect to regularly see signs and wonders if the church is real and truly committed to God's Word?
 - No. This was a unique time in establishment of church. (more later)
- **Seek unity:** But, the devotion to the unity of the church, the solid teaching of Scripture, prayer, sharing and generosity, regular gathering and eating together,

welcome to outsiders, and people coming to faith should always characterize our churches.

- **Hope for great things from God:** We should believe that God can be trusted to do great things among and through us. And a great attitude of thanksgiving and praise.
- **Build small groups:** important to the life of the fellowship. They met in homes and met together. Obviously 3000 people could not experience a deep personal connection with everyone, so they needed to be able to fellowship in smaller groups as well.

General Application: (discuss in large group)

- We observe that the natural outpouring of someone who has repented and is following Jesus is to be involved in the local fellowship of believers, breaking of bread, praying, hearing and applying the teaching of God's word, and also being generous with their resources. **Which of these do people in our churches struggle with the most? How could this story encourage us?**

Personal Application:

- **Which of these aspects of the early church do you struggle to live out the most?** (teaching of God's word, fellowship, breaking of bread together, prayer, generosity). How might this reveal that you are holding something back from God? **How can remembering that we have been forgiven help us to repent of this and allow the Holy Spirit to empower us to follow Christ in deeper and more trusting ways?**

3. The Healing of the Lame Beggar

Acts 3: 1-26

One day, Peter and John were going to the temple to pray at the hour of prayer, and they met a lame man. This man had been lame since birth and was carried to the gate of the Temple called Beautiful every day to beg from those going to the temple. When he saw Peter and John entering the temple, he asked them for money. Peter and John both looked at the man, and Peter said, "Look at us." The lame beggar looked at them, expecting to receive something from them but Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." And Peter took the lame man by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his legs became strong. And leaping up, he stood and began to walk. Then he entered the temple with them walking, and leaping, and praising God! And the people saw him walking and praising God, and recognized him as the one who had sat at the gate of the temple, asking for money. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened.

Peter said to the crowd, "Why are you astounded as if we did this in our own power when it was the power of God who was glorifying his son Jesus? . . . You killed Jesus, the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. And it was by faith in the name of this Jesus that this man whom you know was made strong."

He then explained the scriptures beginning with Abraham all the way through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He then said, "Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord"

INTRODUCTION: (Ask a pre-story question to discuss in pairs or as a group.)

- **Think of a time in your life where you have witnessed a miracle? How did that make you feel? Who received the credit for the miracle?**

THE STORY: Tell the story and learn it together as a group through many repetitions.

POST-STORY DISCUSSION: Lead a discussion guided by these questions:

OUTLINE VERSION (for teacher to use when teaching)

Details: What happened? To see what truths we can learn.

- **What were Peter and John doing? Where? When? What does that teach us?**
- **Who met Peter and John? What was he like?**
 - **How did Peter and John respond to him? What did they say?**
- **What happened to the man? How did he respond? Why?**
- **How did other people respond? What does this show us?**
- **What did Peter tell the crowd? What can we learn from this?**
- **How did the change that occurred in the lame man's body reflect what happens as the Gospel changes someone's heart?**

Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow are found in this story. Which ones still apply to us today?

- Regular pattern of prayer and worship.
- Pay attention to and care for the needy person in front of them.
- Respond to God's blessings with sincere worship and gratitude to God
- Preach with boldness and sound doctrine. Communicate the basic Gospel truths about Jesus Christ, rooted in all of Scripture from the OT through Christ.
- Call people to a response of repentance and entrusting their lives to Jesus.
- Rest in Him.
- Don't take credit for what God does!

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

- **In what ways can we as Christians be so busy with our activities that we walk right past someone who is in need? How do we sometimes prioritize our schedules and events over loving people?**

Personal Application:

- **In what way have you recently become so busy serving God and doing good things that you have missed loving or caring for someone in need?**

FULL VERSION (for teacher to use for study in preparation)

Let's look at the details that we observe describing what happened in the story in order to see what truths we can learn.

- **What were Peter and John doing? Where? When? What does that teach us?**
 - Peter and John were working side by side and going to the temple together to pray at the hour of prayer.
 - It teaches us that ministry is meant to do together. John and Peter were very different in their personalities in the gospels. John was known for being very kind and loving others while Peter was known for his boldness and brashness.
 - They were going to the temple to pray at the hour of prayer.
 - It teaches us that prayer was a regular part of their lives. They were consistently praying and observing prayer times.
 - Through their habits of prayer and faithfulness they were putting themselves in a place where God could use them, where they could respond to the Spirit to opportunities to minister in Jesus' name.
 - They were not opposing the traditional forms of prayer and worship. They were still Jews!
 - By going to the temple they were showing that this new life, this Gospel of Jesus, was not a rejection of the Temple or the faith and history of the Israelites. Rather it was a fulfillment or a continuation of what God had been going through Israel as He brought the Savior, the Messiah, to save sinners.
 - They also, without compromising their faith in Christ, were able to stay connected to or related to the surrounding culture so that they could have a platform for sharing the Gospel.

- **Who met Peter and John? What was he like? Where was he? What was he doing?**
 - There was a man lame since birth at the entrance to the temple right outside a gate. **What would life be like for this lame man? How would other people have thought of him?**
 - Desperate, dependent on others, outcast, despised, impoverished. He was stuck, hopeless, a slave to this daily life.
 - Others would have looked down on him, thought him of little worth, a nuisance. Would be seen as spiritually and morally inferior. People might have thought he was lame because of sin.
 - (Ex. John 9:1-3) - What did Jesus say about this?

- **How did Peter and John respond to him? What could they have done instead? What did Peter and John first tell him? Why? How can this help us deal with needy people? What can this teach us about relating to the poor and needy?**
 - The time of prayer would be a busy time at the Temple with many people passing by. It would have been easy to walk by and ignore him even if he was calling out.

- They said, “Look at us.” They wanted eye contact to show him dignity. They were not ashamed to look him in the eyes. He was special, worthy because created in the image of God. It was still true even though he had many problems.
 - We can learn to be more prayerful and sensitive to the Holy Spirit as we step into the world, to look at the needy the way Jesus would, seeing value and dignity. We can be willing sometimes to pause, take time and listen, look people in the eyes, connect with them.
- **What did they say next to him? What does this show us about Peter and John?**
 - “I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk”. They believed that Jesus was able to heal him.
 - He uses physical healing to preach the Gospel, to point directly to Jesus Christ, to show how God healed this man to glorify Jesus.
- **What did Peter do next? What does this teach us? Why did Peter take his hand?**
 - Peter took him by the right hand and raised him up.
 - He touched him, was not afraid of him being unclean.
 - It was like he was encouraging him to take that first step of walking out his new faith.
- **What happened to the man? What do you think was going through the lame man's mind after Peter told him to rise up and walk? How did he respond? Why?**
 - He could have felt doubt or unbelief at first. He was then encouraged by Peter taking him by the hand to help him walk out his faith.
 - He was immediately healed; his legs were strengthened so much that he leaped up, stood, and began to walk.
 - He then went into the temple, walking, leaping, and praising God.
 - The right response when God works is praise and thanksgiving - whole hearted worship.
 - God is the one who receives the glory, not man. By entering the temple, the lame man is recognizing the source of his healing. The focus is not on the miracle itself, but the God of the miracle.
 - By responding so publicly he is bearing witness to others of the new life he has found in Christ.
 - He found that the new life he found in Christ was more beautiful than life at the Beautiful gate.
- **How did other people respond? What does this show us?**
 - They recognized him as the man who had been lame for years.
 - They were full of wonder and amazement, maybe thinking it was Peter's power that healed him rather than recognizing the power as being from God bringing glory to Jesus.
 - Our unbelieving earthly hearts don't naturally give glory to God but look for earthly explanations.

- **What did Peter tell the crowd? What can we learn from this?**
 - He pointed the attention away from himself and toward God, particularly toward Jesus.
 - He showed the main purpose for miracles in the New Testament - to bring glory to Jesus Christ and to establish His Church through His Word.
 - He used the opportunity to explain the Gospel of Christ, showing how all of God's Word, beginning with Abraham, was pointing to Jesus and his death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins. (It was Chronological Bible Storying!)
 - He did not just give them information. He called them to repentance and trust in Christ alone as their Savior and Lord.
 - Evangelists must turn attention away from ourselves and toward Christ our Savior. Likewise we must call unbelievers to do the same thing!

- **How are we to understand how in this story it is about one man, and in the previous story 3,000 men are saved?**
 - We are able to see that the individual is important to God. He cares about the masses, but also cares about the one man. We learn that even those who care about reaching many should also care about each individual. We must not be too busy trying to reach so many people that we miss reaching the person right in front of us.

- **How did the change that occurred in the lame man's body reflect what happens as the Gospel changes someone's heart?**
 - Went from bondage in his broken body to freedom to be walking, leaping, and praising God
 - Without Christ we are in bondage to sin in our spirits. His Gospel frees us from sin to be able worship Him in Spirit and in truth.

Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow are found in this story. Which ones still apply to us today?

- **Prayer and Worship.** Peter and John had a regular pattern of prayer and worship.
 - It put them in a place where they could listen to God and respond to his Spirit in ministry.
 - When and how we pray and worship can vary, but it is important that we all make it a regular habit.
 - Be sensitive to the Spirit's direction as you live a life of prayer.
- **Pay attention. Care for the needy.** Peter and John stopped, paid attention to, and cared for the needy person in front of them. Peter and John offered what they had to offer instead of just refusing to help. Many ways to reach out to meet people's needs - financial help, sharing our time, prayer
- **Gratitude and worship.** The man who was healed responded with sincere worship and gratitude to God. Was not embarrassed.

- **Preach the Word.** Peter's preaching was bold, doctrinally sound, and communicated the basic Gospel truths about Jesus Christ. Rooted in all of Scripture from the OT through Christ. He also called people to a response of repentance and trusting themselves to Jesus.
 - While styles of preaching or communicating the Gospel may vary widely, these basic principles always apply
 - The Gospel not only save people's souls but also is part of redeeming everything in the world that is wrong, including physical brokenness
- **Repent and believe:** People who heard the gospel message were commanded to repent and turn back so that the sins of people may be blotted out and times of refreshment may come from the presence of the Lord.
 - We need to remember the importance of repentance for the forgiveness of sins in our teaching, preaching, and discipleship. We are only saved from our sins once, but the ongoing life of a Christian should be one of repentance and faith as we grow closer and closer to God and live a more holy life.
- **Rest in Him.** Ultimately repentance and faith connects us to the Presence of God. This is where we rest. This is how our hearts are refreshed and made alive.
- **Don't take credit** for what God does!

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

- **In what ways can we as Christians be so busy with our activities that we walk right past someone who is in need? How do we sometimes prioritize our schedules and events over loving people?**

Personal Application:

- **In what way have you recently become so busy serving God and doing good things that you have missed loving or caring for someone in need?**

4. Peter and John before the Religious Leaders

Acts 4:1-14

After the lame man was healed, the priests, the temple guard, and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. So they seized Peter and John and put them in jail until the next day. But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

The next day the high priest and other rulers met and had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: If you are asking about this act of kindness shown to a lame man, it is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. For Jesus is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.' Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

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. But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition.

So they strictly warned them not to speak or teach any more in the name of Jesus. Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes, to listen to you or to him? We must speak about what we've seen and heard (witnessed)."

INTRODUCTION: (Ask a pre-story question to discuss in pairs or as a group.)

- Have you ever been tempted to not tell the truth or to shift the events of what happened in order not to get in trouble? Talk to your neighbour about this story and why you acted the way you did?

THE STORY: Tell the story and learn it together as a group through many repetitions.

POST-STORY DISCUSSION: Lead a discussion guided by these questions:

OUTLINE VERSION (for teacher to use when teaching)

Details: What happened? To see what truths we can learn.

- **After the lame man was healed, who came to Peter and John. What were they upset about? Why do you think they were upset?**
- **What happened the next day? What did the religious leaders ask them? What can we learn from this?**
- **How did Peter respond to their question and to this persecution? Who empowered him to respond the way he does? What can we learn from this?**
- **How did Peter answer their question, “By what power or what name did you do this?”**
- **Peter said, “YOU crucified him, but GOD raised him from the dead.” What does this statement teach us?**
- **How can the story of Joseph help us understand Peter's words?**
- **What does Peter call Jesus? How does that relate to where the man was healed? What does he say about Jesus and salvation?**
- **What did the religious leaders notice about Peter and John? What did they recognize as the source of their confidence? What does this teach us?**
- **What prevented the leaders from arguing with Peter and John? So how did they try to handle the situation to make people not pay attention to Peter's message? Why do you think they did this?**
 - **How may church leaders today try to use fear to control or influence their people? How does this display their own fear?**
- **How did Peter and John respond to the leaders' order? What does this teach us?**
- **Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow are found in this story. Which ones still apply to us today?**
 - **Be bold. Doing what is right in God's eyes.**
 - **Expect persecution or opposition. Trust the promise for God to be with us in the persecution.**
 - **Preach the Gospel.**
 - **Be witnesses.**
 - **Be saved.**
 - **Be with Jesus.**
 - **Rely on the Holy Spirit.**

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

- **What are some steps we can take to promote clear and persuasive Biblical preaching and teaching in our churches?**
-
- **What are some forms of persecution that believers in Christ face today? How can this story help us persevere under persecution? What does boldness look like in the lives of Christians?**

Personal Application:

- **What does boldness look like for you in evangelism? How could this story help encourage you to be more trusting in Jesus and not fear man?**
- **What is one situation where you are tempted to cling too much to the authority God has given you with your title or position and to care too much about what others think of you?**
-
- **What is one step you can take this week to more fully “be with Jesus”?**

FULL VERSION (for teacher to use for study in preparation)

Let's look at the details that we observe describing what happened in the story in order to see what truths we can learn.

- **After the lame man was healed, who came to Peter and John. What were they upset about? Why do you think they were upset?**
 - Peter and John were teaching the people about the resurrection of the dead in Jesus. This greatly disturbed the religious leaders and Sadducees.
 - This teaches us that the religious leaders wanted to be the only ones to teach others and didn't want others to have the authority to teach.
 - The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, so they think this is false teaching.
 - They were disturbed that thousands of people listening to and interested in Peter and John's teaching. Perhaps jealous and afraid to lose their power and authority.

- **What happened the next day? What did the religious leaders ask them? What can we learn from this?**
 - "By what power or what name did you do this?"
 - They were blind but they did not have a true understanding of the Old Testament that they taught. Shows us the ignorance of the leaders. They claimed to know everything in the scriptures but they did not recognize the Messiah when he came.
 - Arrogance. Protective of own authority to teach.
 - Fear. Feared losing their power. Feared the message of the apostles.

- **How did Peter respond to their question and to this persecution? Who empowered him to respond the way he does? What can we learn from this?**
 - He was filled with the Holy Spirit
 - We should be dependent on the Holy Spirit in our lives and also in the midst of persecution.
 - **Read Matthew 10:16-22** - When Peter remembered these words of Jesus, how would he have been encouraged?
 - Jesus tells them that they will be persecuted and brought before governors and leaders and that they are not to fear. Jesus tells them that what they will say will be given to them by the Holy Spirit. And they will be saved as they endure to the end.
 - Holy Spirit can help bring to mind the truths that we have learned and experienced.

- **How did Peter answer their question, "By what power or what name did you do this?"**
 - Pointed out that they were upset about an act of kindness.
 - Sin lies to us, denies the truth, tells us that good is bad and bad is good!
 - Gave credit to Jesus! This healing happened because of Jesus Christ of Nazareth who was crucified and raised from the dead.

- **Peter said, “YOU crucified him, but GOD raised him from the dead.” What does this statement teach us?**
 - He was bold, spoke the truth about their own sin and guilt.
 - This is part of the gospel.

- **What plan had the leaders had for Jesus? But what was God's plan?**
 - Though man did such an evil thing, God had a greater plan - a plan to raise Jesus up and provide salvation for sinners.

- **How can the story of Joseph help us understand Peter's words?**
 - Similar to Joseph who said, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid.” (Gen. 50: 20)
 - This is what Jesus did for us in his death and resurrection. What we (mankind) intended for evil by crucifying him or causing him to go to the cross on our behalf, God intended for good. Despite our sin against God, we do not need to fear because in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, we are saved.

- **What does Peter call Jesus? How does that relate to where the man was healed? What does he say about Jesus and salvation?**
 - He is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become **the cornerstone**. Salvation is found in **no other name**, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”
 - (Also see Matt 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; 1 Peter 2:6,7; Eph 2:20)
 - Ephesians 2:19-22 - *So then, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*
 - The man was healed at the Temple, which represents God's presence with sinful man. Jesus, by dying for our sins and being raised again, is the real foundation for anyone who calls on his name to be saved.
 - Salvation is exclusive. There is only one way - to trust in Jesus, the Savior who has been promised since the Garden of Eden.
 - People will claim someone can be saved in other ways or by other names but only in the name of Jesus Christ that we are saved.

- **What did the religious leaders notice about Peter and John? What did they recognize as the source of their confidence?**
 - The **boldness of Peter and John**, heard them speak with power and clarity, and were amazed that they were **uneducated, common men**. They were quoting and explaining Scripture, confident in their teaching.
 - They **had BEEN WITH Jesus**.

- Being with Jesus changes everything, even the religious leaders understood that being a disciple or apprentice to Jesus changed them.
 - **What does this teach us?**
 - God can use even ordinary, uneducated people.
 - “God doesn't call the qualified; he qualifies the called.”
 - Uses those who have been with Jesus, who have an intimate relationship with God through Christ. Those who humble themselves, trusting him.
 - But being with Jesus had provided them a true education of the Gospel and how the whole of Scriptures had been moving toward Christ.
- **What prevented the leaders from arguing with Peter and John? So how did they try to handle the situation to make people not pay attention to Peter's message? Why do you think they did this?**
 - The healed man was standing there in front of everyone!
 - They ordered them not to speak or teach anymore in the name of Jesus.
 - They feared their influence. Still resisting the Gospel.
- **How may church leaders today try to use fear to control or influence their people? How does this display their own fear?**
 - They fear to lose their own authority, their sense of ownership or control or favor.
 - threats to curse or to throw people out of their church
 - refuse to promote and develop other leaders, remove their opportunities for ministry for fear of them becoming more influential
 - threaten to cause division or mobilize others against you
- **How did Peter and John respond to the leaders' order? What does this teach us?**
 - They told them clearly and without fear that they had to obey God in everything, even if it meant disobeying the leaders.
 - They said, “We MUST speak about what we've seen and heard.” After the seeing the wonder of Jesus' death and resurrection, they had to testify to others.
 - Peter and John feared and trusted God. They knew who provided real life. Men could take their physical lives, but God was the one to save their soul.
- **Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow are found in this story. Which ones still apply to us today?**
 - **Be bold.** Doing **what is right** in God's eyes.
 - **Expect persecution or opposition.** There will always be opposition in the world against the Gospel and the rightly taught Word of God. Those in

power often do not want their power to be challenged. We see that the early church had to deal with people who feared fellow men and loved their power and position more than the fear of God. But God empowers his people with his message. The Holy Spirit enables them to endure persecution and stand up for Christ.

- **Trust the promise for God to be with us in the persecution.**
- **Preach the Gospel.** Peter declared the plain truth about Jesus' death and especially his resurrection and the need for all people to repent of their sins and trust in him. Clear Gospel teaching.
- **Be witnesses.** Peter and John said they MUST tell others about Jesus. They were obeying Jesus' commands to be his witnesses.
- **Be saved.** People need to be saved through Jesus because "salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."
- **Be with Jesus.** Peter and John had been with Jesus, and it changed them. We also need to seek to be with Jesus in prayer and Bible study in order that he continues to change us.
- **Rely on the Holy Spirit.**

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

- **What are some steps we can take to promote clear and persuasive Biblical preaching and teaching in our churches?**
- **What are some forms of persecution that believers in Christ face today? How can this story help us persevere under persecution? What does boldness look like in the lives of Christians?**

Personal Application:

- **What does boldness look like for you in evangelism? How could this story help encourage you to be more trusting in Jesus and not fear man?**
- **What is one situation where you are tempted to cling too much to the authority God has given you with your title or position and to care too much about what others think of you?**
- **What is one step you can take this week to more fully "be with Jesus"?**

5. Ananias and Sapphira

Acts 4:32-5:11

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions were their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. Even a man called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God."

When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"

"Yes," she said, "that is the price."

Peter said to her, "How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."

At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

INTRODUCTION: (Ask a pre-story question to discuss in pairs or as a group.)

- What do you think is most important in the church, unity or truth?

THE STORY: Tell the story and learn it together as a group through many repetitions.

POST-STORY DISCUSSION: Lead a discussion guided by these questions:

OUTLINE VERSION (for teacher to use when teaching)

Details: What happened? To see what truths we can learn.

- **How does the story describe how believers lived together? How were they made able to live this way? How does grace produce unity?**
- **We observe that the apostles continued to testify with great power about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. How does the apostles' teaching relate to the unity of the believers? What does this show us?**
 - **It was the power of God's grace at work in them as it had taken root in their lives. The Gospel produces unity.**
- **How did Barnabas practically demonstrate his trust in Jesus? Why would it take faith on his part to do what he did?**
- **Was Barnabas required to sell his land and donate all the money? What does his gift teach us about giving? What does this show us about the trustworthiness of the apostles?**
- **What happened with Ananias and Saphira? What was wrong with what they did? Were they required to give away all the money? Why do you think they did what they did?**
- **How does Peter respond to what Ananias did? How did he know? Why did Peter rebuke him? How could this happen in the early church where it seemed that people were responding so positively to the Gospel and loving each other so well?**
- **How was Ananias punished for his sin? Why was it such a severe punishment? What was God teaching the church of that time and us as well?**
- **Why did Peter ask Sapphira about the money when he already knew the answer?**
- **Great fear came upon all those who saw and heard about these things in the whole church. What does that teach us? When can fear be good?**

Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow are found in this story. Which ones still apply to us today?

1. **Unity: We should be one in heart and mind.**
2. **Grace at Work:**
3. **Generosity: We are to share with those in need.**
4. **Trustworthiness:**

5. **Truthfulness: We must not lie to God or other people.**
6. **Holiness:**
7. **Identity:** Trust Jesus for your identity instead of lying to impress people.
8. **Preach the Gospel:**
9. **Trust the Gospel:**

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

- **What are some ways that we Christians sometimes try to make others think that we are more spiritual than we actually are? What types of things do we say or do?**
 - Ex. Trying to make people think you are a person of prayer or a truly generous person when in reality you are not.
 - Ex. Exaggerating how great and effective your ministry is and how many people are coming to faith. Might even use words of thanksgiving to God when deep down we just want people to be impressed with us.
 - Ex. Teaching others not to entertain corruption but giving in ourselves to bribe the police and make excuses by blaming it on the system.
- **How are we hypocritical and self-serving in the church today?**
- **When is it most difficult to trust the leaders of the church today? How can we promote an attitude of trust and trustworthiness in the church? What should be the attitude of the members of the church? What should be the responsibility of the leaders of the church?**

Personal Application:

- **Is there an area of your life in which you are not taking sin seriously?**
- **What are some words or actions that you use to try to make others think you are more spiritual than you actually are?**
 - **Another way to think about this question- where do you see hypocrisy in your life?**
- **What is a practical way that you can promote a sense of trust and trustworthiness in your own church?**

FULL VERSION (for teacher to use for study in preparation)

Let's look at the details that we observe describing what happened in the story in order to see what truths we can learn.

- **How does the story describe how believers lived together? How were they made able to live this way? How does grace produce unity?**
 - The believers had one heart and mind and shared everything with one another. Some were even selling properties to help others.
 - The apostles continued to preach and testify to Christ's resurrection.

- **We observe that the apostles continued to testify with great power about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. How does the apostles' teaching relate to the unity of the believers? What does this show us?**
 - The resurrection was central to the church's Gospel teaching.
 - It is through the empowering of the Holy Spirit that we are able to testify to the resurrection of Jesus.
 - We live out the truths that we believe. The truth of the Gospel is the foundation for treating others with love.
 - It was the **power of God's grace at work in them** as it had taken root in their lives. Trusting the Gospel of grace produces humility, removes pride in position or ownership, removes jealousy, makes us willing to give because we know we have received God's amazing grace. They knew that they had been saved by grace alone through faith alone and responded by loving fellow brothers and showing grace to each other.
 - The Gospel produces unity. As we trust Jesus for our salvation we become more able to trust him for other things, including providing for us if we sacrifice our own possessions. The Gospel also helps people - both leaders and needy church members - to be trustworthy to receive and use gifts rightly.

- **How did Barnabas practically demonstrate his trust in Jesus? Why would it take faith on his part to do what he did?**
 - Barnabas sold a field and laid the money to the apostles' feet to share with those in need.
 - Barnabas trusted that God would provide for his own needs as he put his trust in Jesus and lived for God's kingdom. (Read Matthew 6:33)

- **Was Barnabas required to sell his land and donate all the money? What does his gift teach us about giving? What does this show us about the trustworthiness of the apostles?**
 - His giving was not required. He chose to do so out of the generosity of his heart. Giving must come from a trusting, generous heart.
 - He then trusted the apostles to distribute the money he gave. Leaders of churches must show themselves trustworthy and concerned about the good of others and about God's kingdom purposes.

- **What happened with Ananias and Saphira? What was wrong with what they did? Were they required to give away all the money? Why do you think they did what they did?**
 - They also, like Barnabas, chose to sell a piece of land. But they planned together to keep some of the money for themselves before presenting the rest to the apostles.
 - This gift was not required of them! They never had to sell the piece of land in the first place but chose to.
 - They were claiming to have brought all the proceeds and not admitting that they kept some for their needs. They lied to the apostles and to God.
 - Maybe they saw how everyone loved what Barnabas had just done and wanted the praise of the Apostles and the other believers. Their faith was just an act - to look spiritual, committed, and generous.

- **How does Peter respond to what Ananias did? How did he know? Why did Peter rebuke him? How could this happen in the early church where it seemed that people were responding so positively to the Gospel and loving each other so well?**
 - He tells Ananias that Satan has filled his heart and that he has lied to the Holy Spirit by pretending he was giving all the money. His lie was not just lying to man but to God.
 - Our sin is first and foremost against God.
 - Satan is a deceiver and is always trying to penetrate the church and cause division in the church. We see that he does not like it when a church is living in unity of one heart and mind.
 - Satan filling our heart and making us lie to the Spirit, to others, and to ourselves is the opposite of seeing God's grace powerfully at work in someone.
 - Ananias' lie was in pretending he was more generous than he was in order to impress others. If he truly believed in the Gospel he would know that his identity is secure in Jesus.

- **How was Ananias punished for his sin? Why was it such a severe punishment? What was God teaching the church of that time and us as well?**
 - God is serious about sin, particularly lying to God. A church that is not serious about sin is denying the holiness of God and the power of the Gospel. This is an important time when God is laying the foundation for Christ's church. This stark punishment makes it clear to people the sin we deserve and the wonder of God's grace to save us from it.
 - The wages of sin is death. This is what we all deserve if not for the mercy of God. Ananias' punishment was just.
 - Sin, no matter how big or little we think it is, separates us from a Holy God. God has the power to Judge and ultimately will Judge all people one day.
 - We are blessed to know that we have the gospel of grace for those who believe in Jesus Christ and what he has done. We must not take it for granted.

- **Why did Peter ask Sapphira about the money when he already knew the answer?**
 - He gave her a chance to confess her sin, repent, and receive forgiveness, but she tried to hide her sin and experienced the judgment of God. It was not Peter who laid down the judgment, but God.
- **Great fear came upon all those who saw and heard about these things in the whole church. What does that teach us? When can fear be good?**
 - Proverbs 1:7 says “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom.”
 - We should pray for God's help to live a life of repentance, dependent on the Holy Spirit.
 - We should stand in awe of the Lord who is all powerful while also realizing he is the same Lord who calls us friend.

Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow are found in this story. Which ones still apply to us today?

- **Unity: We should be one in heart and mind.**
- **Grace at Work:** Through faith, let grace work itself out in our hearts and bear fruit in our lives.
- **Generosity: We are to share with those in need. Is it wrong to possess personal property?**
 - Peter did not condemn Ananias for owning property or for owning the funds from the sale. He condemned him for lying to God.
 - Someone needs to examine their own heart to see if their attitude is one of sharing what God has given them joyfully and being ready to sacrifice themselves to help those in need.
- **Trustworthiness:** Be people in whom others can put their trust - whether a leader who needs to steward resources or a needy person who needs to be honest about his needs without exaggerating.
- **Truthfulness: We must not lie to God or other people,** especially if our goal is to exalt ourselves in the eyes of others. We must be honest about sin, especially the sin of our hearts. Lying is wrong, one of the Ten Commandments even, but loving our own reputation instead of honoring God is ultimately a sin against God. **What story in the OT does this remind you of?**
 - David and Bathsheba. “I have sinned against the Lord.”
- **Holiness:** God's demands holiness and punishes those who refuse to repent and trust the Savior. **Will people always fall down and die immediately when confronted with sin against God?**
 - Clearly not, but the punishment for unrepentant sin is still death. Sin is serious.
- **Identity:** Trust Jesus for your identity instead of lying to impress people.
- **Preach the Gospel:** We see that the early church continued fulfilling the earlier command to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and focused on the resurrection.
- **Trust the Gospel:** The reason that being reminded of the Gospel is so important for unity is that it reminds us of our true identity. As forgiven sinners covered in the righteousness of Christ, adopted as God's children, we are freed from having to pretend we are something we are not. It frees us of any motivation to lie, steal,

and deceive. And when we fail and sin, it reminds us to repent and run back to our Father in heaven who loves us. We are all guilty of hypocrisy at some level. The gospel calls us to repent! This couple seemed to be ok with their hypocrisy! This should be a good warning to us not to be ok with our sin, as it is a serious matter before a Holy God!

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

- **What are some ways that we Christians sometimes try to make others think that we are more spiritual than we actually are? What types of things do we say or do?**
 - Ex. Trying to make people think you are a person of prayer or a truly generous person when in reality you are not.
 - Ex. Exaggerating how great and effective your ministry is and how many people are coming to faith. Might even use words of thanksgiving to God when deep down we just want people to be impressed with us.
 - Ex. Teaching others not to entertain corruption but giving in ourselves to bribe the police and make excuses by blaming it on the system.
- **How are we are hypocritical and self serving in the church today?**
- **When is it most difficult to trust the leaders of the church today? How can we promote an attitude of trust and trustworthiness in the church? What should be the attitude of the members of the church? What should be the responsibility of the leaders of the church?**

Personal Application:

- **Is there an area of your life in which you are not taking sin seriously?**
- **What is are some words or actions that you use to try to make others think you are more spiritual than you actually are?**
 - **Another way to think about this question- where do you see hypocrisy in your life?**
- **What is a practical way that you can promote a sense of trust and trustworthiness in your own church?**

6. The Apostles before the Jewish Council

Acts 5:12-42

After the deaths of Ananias and Saphira, the apostles continued to do many signs and wonders. They were meeting at a gathering place beside the Temple, and many believers were added to their number, both men and women. Many people were coming from surrounding towns bringing the sick and demon possessed, even laying them in mats in the street so that the shadow of Peter could pass over them as he walked past. And they were all healed.

At that time the high priest rose up along with the Sadducees, and filled with jealousy they arrested the apostles and put them in the prison. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, saying, "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life." And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.

When the high priest and the Jewish council gathered the next day they called for the apostles to be brought to them.—They could not find them at the prison, although the guards were there and the doors locked. They were greatly confused when a report came to them saying that the apostles were at the temple teaching others. The soldiers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.

At this time the high priest questioned them, saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you are making us guilty for this man's blood."

Peter answered him, "We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. And we are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

When they heard this they were enraged and wanted to kill them. At that time a Pharisee and teacher named Gamaliel stood and spoke to the Jewish council after having the apostles placed outside. He reminded them about other people who rose up claiming to be the Messiah and how each of their movements had failed. He then warned the other leaders, saying, "Keep away from these men, for if this plan is of man, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!"

The council took the advice of Gamaliel, called the apostles back inside and beat them, and commanded them to not speak in the name of Jesus.

The apostles left the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name of Jesus. They then continued teaching and preaching in his name in the temple and also house to house.

INTRODUCTION: (Ask a pre-story question to discuss in pairs or as a group.) **Think of a time in your life when you experienced jealousy? Why were you jealous?**

THE STORY: Tell the story and learn it together as a group through many repetitions.

POST-STORY DISCUSSION: Lead a discussion guided by these questions:

OUTLINE VERSION (for teacher to use when teaching)

Details: What happened? To see what truths we can learn.

- **What things were happening with the church after the deaths of Ananias and Saphira? What does this teach us?**
- **What do you know about the Sadduces and their party? What about the high priest?**
- **What was the response of these religious leaders? What was not their response? Why do you think they were jealous and angry?**
- **How did God help the apostles in the midst of persecution? What did he have the apostles do? What did he not have them do? How did they respond to his instructions? What does this teach us?**
- **What were some of the different responses to the miracles God was doing through the apostles?**
- **How did the soldiers treat the apostles the second time - after they were found teaching at the Temple instead of in their cells and people? Why?**
- **What accusations did the Chief Priest make of the apostles? How were their accusations hypocritical?**
- **How did Peter respond? What was his attitude? What were his words? What can we learn from him here?**
- **How did most of the Jewish leaders respond to Peter's words? Who did God use to temper their wrath? What does this teach us about God?**
- **When the disciples were called back, beaten, and warned again not to keep speaking about Jesus, how did they respond? What does this teach us?**

Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow are found in this story. Which ones still apply to us today?

- **Share the Words of Life:** Speak God's Word clearly.
- **Expect persecution.**
- **Listen to God rather than men.**
- **Depend on the Holy Spirit.**
- **Live / speak boldly even in the midst of persecution.**
- **Build the church on the foundation of**
 - **God's Word**
 - **God's Spirit**
- **Expect God to build his church and grow it.**
- **Meet together & preach/teach-** whole church also **small groups.**

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

- **What type of persecution do Christians face today? What about near you?**
- **What situations can lead Christians to the kind of anger and jealousy we see in the religious leaders in this story? How can the gospel message of repentance and faith help us battle anger and jealousy?**
- **When do we value our safety and security more than the Gospel and the Great Commission? How can this story encourage us to be bold for the Gospel?**

Personal Application:

- **Where do you face persecution in your own life? Have you ever rejoiced to be counted worthy to suffer for Christ? In what ways can the truth of the gospel help encourage you?**
- **Where do you see jealousy or anger in your life? How can the gospel message of repentance and faith help you?**

FULL VERSION (for teacher to use for study in preparation)

Let's look at the details that we observe describing what happened in the story in order to see what truths we can learn.

- **What things were happening with the church after the deaths of Ananias and Saphira? What does this teach us?**
 - The apostles continued doing signs and wonders. Many people were coming to be healed and putting their faith in Jesus.
 - God was continuing to establish his church. He did miraculous things through the apostles as a way to back up and enforce the gospel message as a way of helping establish and strengthen the early church. It is a pattern repeated throughout Acts.

- **What do you know about the Sadduces and their party? What about the high priest?**
 - Sadduces were considered to be more liberal than the Pharisees, accepting only the Torah (first five books of OT) as Scripture. They did not believe in angels, supernatural gifts, the resurrection, eternal life, heaven, or hell. (See Acts 23:8)

- **What was the response of these religious leaders? What was not their response? Why do you think they were jealous and angry?**
 - They did not believe or even tolerate the movement of believers.
 - The high priest and Sadducees were jealous.
 - They arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison.
 - Proverbs 6:34 says that jealousy makes a man furious, unmerciful. So maybe the leaders were thinking, "The crowd should be gathering around us instead of them." Feared losing reputation, honor, influence.
 - Religious leaders are filled with jealous anger because their beliefs are being challenged and they are losing power.

- **How did God help the apostles in the midst of persecution? What did he have the apostles do? What did he not have them do? How did they respond to his instructions? What does this teach us?**
 - They were put in prison but at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out. He did not have them hide to protect themselves. Instead he said,
 - "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life." **What is the Life he was talking about?**
 - Salvation and forgiveness of sin through repentance and faith in Jesus. And all the blessings that come with it.
 - They obeyed and entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach, to do the very thing that got them arrested at first.
 - They saw how God was faithful to protect them and empower them, and instead of hiding in fear, they trusted him with their lives and immediately went right back out into public to proclaim the Good News!

- God used the very thing that the Saducees did not believe in, an angel, to rescue his people. God was teaching his disciples that he can deliver his servants from the world's oppression anytime he sees fit.
 - Scripture says that when waves of persecution or trial come, God can deliver us if he wills so. Not only were the apostles divinely delivered, they were divinely commissioned. They were to hold their ground, stand firm, and deliver the entire message of new life in Christ.
 - They were living lives of dependence on the Holy Spirit.
- **What were some of the different responses to the miracles God was doing through the apostles?**
 - Many came for help. Many others believed the message of the Gospel.
 - Others, like the soldiers and leaders, were confused or angry or fearful.
- **How did the soldiers treat the apostles the second time - after they were found teaching at the Temple instead of in their cells and people? Why?**
 - The soldiers brought them to the leaders, but not by force. The apostles had the support of the people and were afraid of being stoned by them.
- **What accusations did the Chief Priest make of the apostles? How were their accusations hypocritical?**
 - They accused them of refusing to obey their orders to not preach this new doctrine and accused them of blaming them for Jesus' death?
 - It actually was the religious leaders who said- "His blood be on us and our children" back in Matthew 27:25, but now they are refusing to take responsibility for his death.
- **How did Peter respond? What was his attitude? What were his words? What can we learn from him here?**
 - Peter answered him, "We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." What does it teach us that Peter said these words?
 - Peter has great courage to obey God instead of fearing man because he knows what is true. He is willing to stake his life on the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead and that he was called by God to offer people repentance and forgiveness of sins through Jesus.
 - In the face of danger and opposition, they did not negotiate or compromise with the high priest for the sake of their own personal comfort or even for their lives.
 - He also claims to be a witness to these things along with the Holy Spirit. We see that the Holy spirit is given to those who obey him. **We know that it is by grace through faith that we become believers and now it says we get the Holy Spirit for those who obey. How can we better understand this?**
 - For those who have truly placed their faith in Jesus it will lead to obedience. Faith leads to obedience. So if you do not have any

obedience, then it may show you that you never truly placed your faith in Jesus. Our life should show a sort of change through our faith.

- Ephesians 1:13 tells us when we believed in Jesus we were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.
- **How did most of the Jewish leaders respond to Peter's words? Who did God use to temper their wrath? What does this teach us about God?**
 - They were angry and wanted to kill them. But then a respected religious leader named Gamaliel stood up and spoke to them, telling them, "Keep away from these men, for if this plan is of man, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!"
 - God used Gamaliel to speak wisdom and calm the leaders down. We see he did it by putting Peter and the apostles outside why he did this. He was not trying to shame the leaders in front of the apostles but corrected them separately
 - Gamaliel was wise enough to know and understand that God's plans will never fail. He is faithful and will fulfill his promises.
- **When the disciples were called back, beaten, and warned again not to keep speaking about Jesus, how did they respond? What does this teach us?**
 - They rejoiced in being counted worthy to suffer dishonor for Christ. They ignored the leaders' threats and continued teaching in the name of Jesus, obeying God rather than men.
 - Knowing Christ was so precious to them that the disciples were willing to be beaten instead of compromising on the truth of the gospel. They suffered their beatings with deep joy of the chance to serve Jesus, the Savior to whom they owed their very lives.
 - Matthew 5:10 - "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake"

Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow are found in this story. Which ones still apply to us today?

- **Share the Words of Life:** Speak God's Word clearly. The angel commands and tells them, "**Go and stand in the temple and speak** to the people all the words of this Life."
 - Not only were the apostles **divinely delivered**, they were **divinely commissioned**. They were to hold their ground, stand firm, and deliver the entire message of new life in Christ.
- **Expect persecution.** Satan and the world will always resist the Spirit led proclamation of and living out of the Word of God.
- **Listen to God rather than men.**
- **Depend on the Holy Spirit.**
- **Live / speak boldly even in the midst of persecution.**
- **Build the church on the foundation of**
 - **God's Word**

- **God's Spirit**
- **Expect God to build his church and grow it.**
- **Meet together & preach/teach-** both as whole church but also in **small groups** in our homes.

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

- **What type of persecution do Christians face today? What about near you?**
- **What situations can lead Christians to the kind of anger and jealousy we see in the religious leaders in this story? How can the gospel message of repentance and faith help us battle anger and jealousy?**
 - Jealousy when visiting pastor seems to get a greater response than yours has done for years.
 - Comparison with other peoples' ministries, missions, churches.
 - Seeing other pastor being better treated by his congregation - better pay, giving a car or school fees.
 - Comparison of education or title.
 - Others get opportunities in ministry that I don't get
- The Gospel helps! The disciples were stand firm and not be jealous **because of the object of their faith, Jesus.** They knew that Jesus had taken the anger of people on himself and also the jealousy already. They were following Christ....and in following Christ they experienced persecution.
- **When do we value our safety and security more than the Gospel and the Great Commission? How can this story encourage us to be bold for the Gospel?**

Personal Application:

- **Where do you face persecution in your own life? Have you ever rejoiced to be counted worthy to suffer for Christ? In what ways can the truth of the gospel help encourage you?**
- **Where do you see jealousy or anger in your life? How can the gospel message of repentance and faith help you?**

7. Stephen Preaching to the Jewish Council

Acts 6:1-53

During this time of the early church in Jerusalem, the Greek speaking believers complained against the Hebrew believers because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. The apostles gathered with many disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables." They then instructed the disciples to choose seven men who were of good reputation and full of the Spirit and of wisdom to be appointed and perform this duty so that they could devote themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. The apostles then laid their hands on the seven chosen and prayed for them. Stephen was one of these men. And the Word of God continued to spread rapidly.

After some time, the religious leaders were angry at Stephen because of some of the great wonders and signs that he was doing. They created false witnesses accusing him of teaching against the law of Moses and against the Temple. Stephen was brought before the High Priest and the council, and he asked Stephen,

"Are these charges true?"

Stephen answered by reminding them of God's faithfulness to the often rebellious Israelites and to His promises throughout the Old Testament. He walked through stories of Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, even the prophets and the exile in Babylon, showing how the entire Old Testament was pointing to the Christ.

The Stephen said, "You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him—you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it."

INTRODUCTION: (Ask a pre-story question to discuss in pairs or as a group.)

- **Think of a time when you noticed a church caring very well for people in need. What did that look like? What was the effect on the church?**

THE STORY: Tell the story and learn it together as a group through many repetitions.

POST-STORY DISCUSSION: Lead a discussion guided by these questions:

OUTLINE VERSION (for teacher to use when teaching)

Details: What happened? To see what truths we can learn.

Let's look at the details that we observe describing what happened in the story in order to see what truths we can learn.

- **In this story we see the first significant conflict within the early church. It seems different from the fellowship we saw in Acts 2 and Acts 4. What was the conflict about? What does this show us about the realities of the life of a church? What does it show us about people's hearts? What sins may have been happening?**
- **How did the apostles address this problem? What might we learn from them about handling conflict between believers?**
- **What kind of people did apostles charge them to appoint? Why were these characteristics important? What does this teach us about Gospel ministry?**
- **What was the fruit of the way the early church handled this conflict? What does this show us?**
- **Religious leaders outside the church became angry when they saw Stephen doing signs and wonders. They had false witnesses telling lies about him, saying he was attacking their religion and customs. (The law of Moses and the Temple) What can we learn from seeing how unbelievers react negatively to the speaking and living out of the Gospel?**
- **How did Stephen answer the high priest when he brought these false accusations to him? How did he NOT respond? How can this help us when we face false accusations?**
- **How did Stephen bring his preaching to a conclusion? How is this a good model for preaching the Gospel? Why is it risky?**

Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow are found in this story. Which ones still apply to us today?

- **Be aware of Satan's devices to create division.**
- **Don't show favoritism:**
- **Listen:** The apostles listened to and heard the cries of the needy in their body. They also granted the other disciples a voice in choosing deacons
- **Value others' opinions:**
- **Prioritize the Word of God:**
- **Be faithful to God's call on your life.**
- **Don't cling to control. Trust people** enough to delegate.
- **Care about the needy, especially those in the church body.**
- **Prioritize diaconal ministry in church.**
- Look for people who are **filled with Spirit, good reputation, wise.**
 - **1 Tim 3:8-13** - qualifications for deacons
- **Commit to build relationships in the body** so that we really can know each other deeply and discern who is best qualified for certain areas of ministry.
- **Be bold in speaking the truth.**
- **Teach fullness of Scripture**, using it all to **point to Christ. Remind believers of the Gospel** over and over!
- **Preach the law, judgment** as part of the Gospel.
- **Be circumcised in heart and ears** - i.e. sensitive to the Spirit. Don't resist the Holy Spirit!

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

- **Are there ways that churches in general could improve on how they do mercy ministry?**
- **What are ways in which our churches could improve on the way we structure our churches? Elders and Deacons?**
- **In what ways can you struggle in prayer and teaching to put the proper time needed to prepare?**

Personal Application:

- **Think about your own church and discuss how you can better balance the teaching of the word of God and prayer in the church together with the mercy ministries of the church. (caring for the tangible needs of the members)**
- **Are there any practical steps you need to take in your church to have the right leaders in place? Are there people in your church that you feel could be qualified to be trained as a deacon?**

FULL VERSION (for teacher to use for study in preparation)

Let's look at the details that we observe describing what happened in the story in order to see what truths we can learn.

- **In this story we see the first significant conflict within the early church. It seems different from the fellowship we saw in Acts 2 and Acts 4. What was the conflict about? What does this show us about the realities of the life of a church? What does it show us about people's hearts? What sins may have been happening?**
 - Conflict will happen, even in the best of churches. Believers in Christ, though we are forgiven and given the Holy Spirit, we still struggle with sin. We will struggle with favoritism, with complaining and murmuring, with seeking to be in control.
 - Language and background differences can easily turn into prejudice or favoritism when we are not listening to the Spirit within us or when we are allowing the grace of God to work powerfully in our hearts to help us love others.
 - Satan hates the church, hates to see the Gospel spreading. He is always looking for ways to cause division and strife.

- **How did the apostles address this problem? What might we learn from them about handling conflict between believers?**
 - Gathered other leaders and disciples (other stakeholders) to talk together.
 - Pointed out the priority of continuing to preach God's Word clearly.
 - Listened to the concerns of the Greek speaking believers.
 - Showed by their actions that caring for physical needs is indeed part of the work of the Gospel, that it was important.
 - Delegated responsibility to other leaders to choose people to take care of the physical needs of believers who were needy.
 - Recognized that different believers have different callings and gifts to exercise in the body of Christ.

- **What kind of people did apostles charge them to appoint? Why were these characteristics important? What does this teach us about Gospel ministry?**
 - **Men of good reputation.** It was important that all the people trusted these men to do things with fairness and honesty.
 - **Men filled with the Holy Spirit.** This shows that this role is not “unspiritual.” It is just as important for these men as for those focused on teaching and prayer to know the Gospel clearly and to submitting themselves to the strong influence of the Holy Spirit. This ministry, though physical, is still a spiritual, Gospel ministry.
 - Through the Gospel God is redeeming all things. It begins with our hearts being redeemed but also involves redeeming problems like hunger, loneliness, or disunity.
 - **Men filled with wisdom.** It would not be an easy ministry. They needed practical wisdom about how to organize themselves and how to promote healthy relationships between believers of different ethnic origins.

- **What was the fruit of the way the early church handled this conflict? What does this show us?**
 - The Word of God continued to spread rapidly.
 - When issues - conflict, physical needs, etc - are handle in a Gospel centered way by people guided by the Spirit, outsiders notice how well the people in the church love each other. Thus Jesus is glorified in the eyes of the world. And people want to experience the life that they see the believers experiencing. They begin to believe that the Word they are sharing is true.

- **Religious leaders outside the church became angry when they saw Stephen doing signs and wonders.** They had false witnesses telling lies about him, saying he was attacking their religion and customs. (The law of Moses and the Temple) **What can we learn from seeing how unbelievers react negatively to the speaking and living out of the Gospel?**
 - Unbelievers often feel jealous, threatened, by the Gospel so they lash out.
 - They listen to and even create lies, trying to make what is good seem bad.
 - The gospel is truly offensive to those who have yet to repent and put their faith in Jesus. It is offensive because it shows us our sin and how we fall short of God's glory and cannot save ourselves.
 - The heart is deceitfully wicked. When we don't get what we want we can create other pathways to make things happen. We can find it hard to celebrate others and can try to tear others down when they have success.

- **How did Stephen answer the high priest when he brought these false accusations to him? How did he NOT respond? How can this help us when we face false accusations?**
 - He did not try to defend himself or protect himself. He trusted God so much that he did not fear what they might do to him.
 - He pointed them to God and his faithfulness to His promises to Israel.
 - He spoke with boldness and with clarity.
 - He connected with things that his listeners already knew and were familiar with and built on those truths.
 - He showed clearly (through CBS!) how all the Law and the Prophets (the Old Testament) was pointing toward Jesus being the long awaited Messiah.
 - He connected his listeners' lives and actions directly with the lives of their ancestors, the characters in the OT stories.

- **How did Stephen bring his preaching to a conclusion? How is this a good model for preaching the Gospel? Why is it risky?**
 - He confronted them personally. He forced them to consider their own hard hearts.
 - He showed them how their external behaviors or qualities (their physical circumcision) meant nothing when a true spiritual circumcision had not happened in their hearts and in their ears?
 - **What should true circumcision mean?**

- It meant identifying yourself by faith with God through the promised Savior. Being part of the covenant people.
 - It meant being cleansed by the shedding of blood.
 - It meant being ready to listen to God's Word and to receive it and respond through an obedient faith.
- He used the example of their ancestors, whom they revered, to show them their own sin and rebellion. To show them how their ancestors had so often rebelled against those calling them to live lives of holiness as they awaited the promised Savior. And to show how they were the same, since they actually killed the one and only Savior, the Messiah, Jesus.
 - He showed them how their privileged status of being the people who received the Law and the promises had been wasted because they refused to believe and obey God's law.

Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow are found in this story. Which ones still apply to us today?

- **Be aware of Satan's devices to create division.**
- **Don't show favoritism:**
- **Listen:** The apostles listened to and heard the cries of the needy in their body. They also granted the other disciples a voice in choosing deacons.
- **Value others' opinions:**
- **Prioritize the Word of God:**
- **Be faithful to God's call on your life.** The disciples knew their primary calling was to pray and teach God's Word.
- **Don't cling to control.** Be willing to entrust things to other people. **Trust people** enough to delegate.
- **Care about the needy, especially those in the church body.**
- **Prioritize diaconal ministry in church.**
- Look for people who are **filled with Spirit, good reputation, wise.**
 - **1 Tim 3:8-13** - qualifications for deacons
- **Commit to build relationships in the body** so that we really can know each other deeply and discern who is best qualified for certain areas of ministry.
- **Be bold in speaking the truth.**
- **Teach fullness of Scripture**, using it all to **point to Christ. Remind believers of the Gospel** over and over!
- **Preach the law, judgment** as part of the Gospel.
- **Be circumcised in heart and ears** - i.e. sensitive to the Spirit. Don't resist the Holy Spirit!

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

- **Are there ways that churches in general could improve on how they do mercy ministry?**

- **What are ways in which our churches could improve on the way we structure our churches? Elders and Deacons?**
- **In what ways can you struggle in prayer and teaching to put the proper time needed to prepare?**

Personal Application:

- **Think about your own church and discuss how you can better balance the teaching of the word of God and prayer in the church together with the mercy ministries of the church. (caring for the tangible needs of the members)**
- **Are there any practical steps you need to take in your church to have the right leaders in place? Are there people in your church that you feel could be qualified to be trained as a deacon?**

8. The Stoning of Stephen

Acts: 7:54-8:1

After Stephen had finished calling the religious leaders stiff-necked people who were uncircumcised in hearts and ears, the religious leaders were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. Be he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

And he said, "Look, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

But they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.

And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

And Saul approved of his execution.

INTRODUCTION: (Ask a pre-story question to discuss in pairs or as a group.)

- Think of a time in your life that you did not want to hear the truth? Explain what happened.

THE STORY: Tell the story and learn it together as a group through many repetitions.

POST-STORY DISCUSSION: Lead a discussion guided by these questions:

OUTLINE VERSION (for teacher to use when teaching)

Details: What happened? To see what truths we can learn.

- **Stephen called the leaders stiff necked people with uncircumcised ears and hearts. How did the religious leaders respond? Why would the accusation about “uncircumcised hearts” anger them.**
- **What did Stephen see? -**
 - **The Son of Man (Jesus) STANDING** at the right hand of God.
 - **Here Jesus is standing instead of sitting - what does that teach?**
- **What is the meaning of “SON of MAN”? -**
 - Daniel 7.13-14
 - Mark 14:61-62 Here Jesus is claiming that He is indeed God, the Messiah.
- **What was the religious leaders’ reaction to Stephen’s vision? What does it teach us?**
- **What did they do before stoning? Why? .**
- **What were Stephen’s final words? How was this like Jesus?**
- **How was Stephen able to forgive his persecutors?**

Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow are found in this story. Which ones still apply to us today?

- **Preach the Gospel**, including both judgment for sin and grace for sinners
- **Be faithful even when persecuted**
- **Take up your cross and follow Jesus.**
- **Receive the Holy Spirit in all his fullness.**
- **Focus on God, not man-** put eyes on eternal things.
- **Eagerly expect our ultimate glorification.**
- **Forgive your enemies** as Christ as forgiven you.

FOCUS on FORGIVENESS:

- **What reasons would Stephen have had to NOT forgive these people? I.e. What excuses could he have made?**
- **What was the key to Stephen’s being able to forgive his murderers?**
- **What grace did God show Stephen even in the midst of his stoning?**
 - **How did this encourage him?**
- **How was the content of Stephen’s speech related to the vision that God gave Stephen.**
- **How had Jesus set an example to help Stephen?**

- **One definition of forgiveness: Forgiveness is, my releasing the guilty person from the punishment due for their sins against me – just as the Father releases me from the punishment due for my sins against Him. How did Stephen exemplify this?**
- **How do people “punish” those who have sinned against them when they refuse to forgive?**

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

- **Who are people we struggle to forgive? What type of excuses might someone give to not forgiven? What is our natural reaction when someone sins against us?**

Personal Application:

- **Who do you struggle to forgive right now? How have you been “collecting the debt” from them? What would it cost to forgive them? Can you believe the gospel enough by faith to forgive them?**

FULL VERSION (for teacher to use for study in preparation)

Let's look at the details that we observe describing what happened in the story in order to see what truths we can learn.

- **Stephen called the leaders stiff necked people with uncircumcised ears and hearts. How did the religious leaders respond? Why would the accusation about “uncircumcised hearts” anger them?**
 - Leaders ground their teeth - (Luke 13.28 - weeping and gnashing of teeth) - became like animals, hardening of heart
 - They are supposed to be the ones obedient to the law, the ones who are truly circumcised, but he is saying their circumcision is not sincere.
 - The natural man will always reject the word of God no matter how great it is preached unless God does the work of regenerating the listener.
- **What did Stephen see? -**
 - full of the Holy Spirit, he was able to gaze into heavens
 - **The Son of Man (Jesus) STANDING** at the right hand of God.
 - **How is Jesus normally described in Scripture when in heaven?**
 - Colossians 3:1, Hebrews 1:3, Ephesians 1:20, Romans 8:34, Hebrews 8:1, Hebrews 10:12, Hebrews 12:2 - always sitting.
 - **In this story Jesus is standing - what does that teach us?**
 - He is standing in order to welcome Stephen, to show him great honor as the first Christian martyr.
 - Stood to receive him into the Kingdom of heaven.
- **What is the meaning of “SON of MAN”? –**

- Daniel 7.13-14 describes one like a son of man who is led into the presence of the God, who is given all authority, glory, sovereign power, worship, and dominion. He is the promised Messiah.
- So Stephen was claiming that Jesus was the Son of Man described in Daniel 7, the Messiah that was promised.
- Mark 14:61-62 shows Jesus making the same claim about himself that Stephen does here. At his trial before the Sanhedrin, when the high priest asked him, *“Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed one?”* His answer: *“I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.”*
 - Here Jesus is claiming that He is indeed God, the Messiah.
- **What was the religious leaders’ reaction to Stephen’s vision? What does it teach us?**
 - What Stephen said made them furious. They cried out loudly and stopped ears. (Was ironic. They were thus displaying their uncircumcized ears!) refused to listen to any more. They rushed at him to take him outside the city to stone him.
 - The religious leaders were very aware that Stephen was claiming to be the Messiah, Jesus, who was in fact the promised Son of Man.
 - Hardened unbelievers completely refuse to listen to the truth.
 - Similarly the high priest had said in Mark 14:63 to Jesus, *“The high priest tore his clothes. ‘Why do we need any more witnesses?’ he asked. ‘You have heard the blasphemy.’”*
- **What did they do before stoning? Why?**
 - Laid their garments down at feet of Saul. Stoning is a sweaty, slow business, needed freedom for movement to throw harder. Saul approved of their actions and was happy to share the responsibility. He was a devout Jew who hated the Christians.
 - Saul saw and heard all that Stephen said.
- **Stephen’s final words :**
 - Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.
 - Lord, do not hold this sin against them.
 - How do we see similarities with Jesus? Followed his example, even to death.
 - Imitating Christ by forgiving persecutors.
 - In forgiving them and telling them of the Son of Man in heaven he is bearing witness, even giving them a chance to understand the Christ and repent.
 - Fell asleep - died, but rose to glory in the other life!
- **How was Stephen able to forgive his persecutors?**
 - He believed the Gospel, i.e he knew how great his own sin was and how great the forgiveness of God was for him. He does not need to have vengeance because he knows God is in control of that.
 - He saw the glory of Christ.

Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow are found in this story. Which ones still apply to us today?

- **Preach the Gospel**, including both judgment for sin and grace for sinners
- **Be faithful even when persecuted**
- **Take up your cross and follow Jesus.** There is great blessing even in dying for him.
- **Receive the Holy Spirit in all his fullness.** Ask him to give you more and more of himself. Asking, seeking, knocking for God to give us more and more of the Holy Spirit. (Luke 11:13)
- Looked up to heaven. **Focus on God, not man-** put eyes on eternal things.
- **Eagerly expect our ultimate glorification.**
- **Forgive your enemies** as Christ as forgiven you.

FOCUS on FORGIVENESS:

- **What reasons would Stephen have had to NOT forgive these people? I.e. What excuses could he have made?**
 - "I have told them the truth and they've rejected it."
 - "They are persecuting and killing me even though I am innocent of sinning against them."
 - "They are the same crowd who killed Jesus."
 - "They are lying and complaining against me."
 - "I am a true believer and am better than them."
 - "They are causing me so much pain and suffering."
 - "I don't deserve this treatment. I am God's servant and preach the truth. They don't deserve my forgiveness."
- **What was the key to Stephen's being able to forgive his murderers?**
 - He had faith in God's love for him as a sinner, of his forgiveness and righteousness bought by Christ. He was full of grace.
 - He knew the truth of God's salvation through Christ, what God had been doing through history to bring him and other sinners a Savior.
 - He knew his position in Christ.
 - He was humble. He knew he needed grace just as his persecutors did. He viewed them as fellow sinners.
- **What grace did God show Stephen even in the midst of his stoning?**
 - He showed him Jesus exalted. A special vision of the Savior!
- **How did this encourage him?**
 - Showed him where he was going – his own glorification.
- **How was the content of Stephen's speech related to the vision that God gave Stephen.**
 - Christ's (and our) glorification is the consummation or completion of the whole history of redemption beginning in the Old Testament.
- **How had Jesus set an example to help Stephen?**
 - He had said on the cross about his murderers, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."
- **One definition of forgiveness: Forgiveness is, my releasing the guilty person from the punishment due for their sins against me – just as the**

Father releases me from the punishment due for my sins against Him.

How did Stephen exemplify this?

- He asked God to forgive them, to show them the same mercy through the same Savior! He wished for them the same mercy he had found.
- **How do people “punish” those who have sinned against them when they refuse to forgive?**
 - Treat them coldly. Distance ourselves.
 - Gossip
 - Remind them of their sins. (Keep a record of wrongs.)
 - Refuse to see anything good in them.
 - Treat them like they owe you something.
- **Tim Keller – 5 ways we “collect the debt”**
 - Become self-righteously “merciful”. Put them in further debt by our mercy.
 - Act cold towards someone, ignoring them.
 - Become demanding.
 - Damage their reputation by warning others about them or publicly “sharing our pain”
 - Rejoice when they are hurt or fail.

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

- **Who are people we struggle to forgive? What type of excuses might someone give to not forgive? What is our natural reaction when someone sins against us?**

Personal Application:

- **Who do you struggle to forgive right now? How have you been “collecting the debt” from them? What would it cost to forgive them? Can you believe the gospel enough by faith to forgive them?**

9. The Church under Persecution

Acts 8:1-8

While Stephen was being killed by stoning, a young man named Saul was present and approved of his execution. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. Devout men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him.

But Saul began to destroy the church, and, entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and put them to prison. But those who were scattered went about preaching the Word wherever they went.

Philip (one of the seven deacons appointed previously) went down to Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid attention to what he said. With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city.

INTRODUCTION: (Ask a pre-story question to discuss in pairs or as a group.)

- Can you think of a time in your life or the life of a friend where someone intended to do evil to you but God worked it out for good?

THE STORY: Tell the story and learn it together as a group through many repetitions.

POST-STORY DISCUSSION: Lead a discussion guided by these questions:

OUTLINE VERSION (for teacher to use when teaching)

Details: What happened? To see what truths we can learn.

- What effect did the stoning of Stephen have on the early church in Jerusalem? How was this a major turning point in the history of the church?
- What happened to the believers when this great persecution arose?
- What is significant about the places where the believers went? Where have you heard the phrase “Judea and Samaria” before? What is God doing?
- What happened to Stephen's body? Who took care of it? What does this show us?
- How do we see the persecution becoming more severe? What was Saul doing?

- **Was this to be the end of Christ's church? What great thing happened as a result of Saul's persecution? Who was contributing to the spread of the church. What do we learn about the believers that promoted the growth of the church?**
- **What does this show us about God? What promise is he fulfilling?**
- **Where did Philip go to travel? What happened there? What exactly did he preach? What story does this remind you of?**
- **Miracles?- Are miracles still needed today to authenticate the gospels or now does the scripture testify to itself?**
 - We see miraculous things being done in parts of the world where the Gospel is breaking in for the first time. Ex. Many Muslims
- **What was the mood in the city as these great things were happening? What does this show us?**

Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow (act, speak, believe) are found in this story? Which ones still apply to us today?

- **Trust in God's sovereign plan.**
- **Trust that God will fulfill his Great Commission and to use us in the process. Step out in faith.**
- **Preach the Gospel.**
- **Be joyful, even in suffering,** as God does his work and fulfills his purposes in us.
- **Lament for the brokenness of the world** and the suffering and death of those we love.
- **Believe that the Gospel is truly for all people,** tribes, and nations.

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

- **What are some current setbacks that churches and believers are dealing with today? How might God use some of these to fulfill his kingdom purposes?**
- **How can leaders in the church be encouraged to keep the Gospel and the Word the highest priority that forms the foundation for the rest of ministry?**

Personal Application:

- **What is there to lament in your life today? How can this story encourage you? Can you pray and trust God that he is working through what you might see as "setbacks" in order to grow your faith and trust him in deeper ways?**
- **How can you be encouraged by this story to preach the true gospel of Jesus Christ and keep that as the heartbeat of the church? What would it look like to be full of joy in the setbacks or in the persecution that comes sometimes with preaching the true gospel?**

FULL VERSION (for teacher to use for study in preparation)

Let's look at the details that we observe describing what happened in the story in order to see what truths we can learn.

- **What effect did the stoning of Stephen have on the early church in Jerusalem? How was this a major turning point in the history of the church?**
 - A great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem, the place where the Holy Spirit empowered the believers and the great growth of the church began. While there had been some persecution before, it became very severe starting at this time.
 - Because the execution of Stephen was approved of, it seems that all restraint was removed from those who wanted to destroy the church.
 - Perhaps because there were now thousands of believers, the Jewish leadership felt more threatened than ever and decided to act. Persecution of believers became something that many approved of.

- **What happened to the believers when this great persecution arose?**
 - Except for the apostles they were all scattered all over the regions of Judea and Samaria.
- **What is significant about the places where the believers went? Where have you heard the phrase “Judea and Samaria” before? What is God doing?**
 - In Jesus’ command before he ascended into heaven. This was the next region the Gospel was to go after Jerusalem.
 - God is using persecution to fulfill his perfect plan to spread the Gospel through his witnesses. God is faithful.
 - What Saul and the Jews “meant for evil, God intended for good, for the saving of many lives,” just like in the days of Joseph, for the spreading of the Gospel.

- **What happened to Stephen's body? Who took care of it? What does this show us?**
 - Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him.
 - It would have been such a dishonor to have one’s body lying exposed. The religious leaders left him in a shameful way and had no intention of burying his body. Devout men still wanted to honor Stephen and give him a proper burial.
 - Were willing to risk themselves in the midst of threat of persecution to show this love, to honor the one who has died for the cause of Christ.

- **How do we see the persecution becoming more severe? What was Saul doing?**
 - He approved of the execution Saul was trying to completely destroy the church, now he felt approved to start persecuting more intensely.
 - Before, the persecution was the apostles and deacons. Now it is the common believer. The persecution is not just in out in the public, but he's

actually entering house after house, searching out anyone connected with the church.

- Without trial or investigation, he just dragged people off to jail without any rights or protections.
- **Was this to be the end of Christ's church? What great thing happened as a result of Saul's persecution? Who was contributing to the spread of the church. What do we learn about the believers that promoted the growth of the church?**
 - Instead of wiping out the church, it helped it to grow.
 - God was pushing them out. Not allowing them to be comfortable in their own fellowship.
 - Cooperation between God and everyday believers.
 - The scattered believers, instead of being fearful, were bold and bore witness about Jesus. They took the opportunity to share the Word wherever they went, empowered by the Holy Spirit. They continued to preach.
- **What does this show us about God? What promise is he fulfilling?**
 - God is faithful to his promises. He said, "You will be filled with power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. And **you will be my witnesses** in Jerusalem, **in Judea and Samaria**, and unto the ends of the world."
 - He is fulfilling his promise to reach all nations through Abraham's seed and is using his followers to do so. Persecution cannot stop the purposes of God.
- **Where did Philip go to travel? What happened there? What exactly did he preach? What story does this remind you of?**
 - (This Philip was an evangelist and one of the seven chosen to be deacon. This was not the apostle Philip.)
 - Samaria - "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem in all Judea and Samaria
 - John 4 - Samaritan woman - "the time is coming when you will neither worship here on this mountain or in Jerusalem."
 - Though he had to scatter, he was committed to the spread of the Gospel.
 - He proclaimed Christ and did miraculous signs. Demons were cast out and lame people were healed.
 - People paid attention to what he said **because of the miraculous signs**.
 - **Miracles often accompanied the word of God** being taught **in frontier and new locations** as the gospel spread. We see this **throughout the book of Acts** as the church grows and is established. The miracles opened people's hearts to listen to the Word preached!
 - Proclaimed the Messiah - rooted the preaching in their history, the works of God through people of Israel.
- **What was the mood in the city as these great things were happening? What does this show us?**
 - The city was filled with joy. Paying attention.
 - Joy is a rightful response to hearing the gospel preached, seeing the mighty works of God, and facing persecution.

Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow (act, speak, believe) are found in this story? Which ones still apply to us today?

- **Trust in God's sovereign plan.** Watch closely for what the Spirit is doing when things are not going according to plan. God often has greater kingdom purposes that he is working out even in the midst of suffering or persecution.
- **Trust that God will fulfill his Great Commission** and to use us in the process. "You will be my witnesses . . . in Judea and Samaria . . ."
- **Step out in faith.** The believers had to take the next step of faith, to move out to other places. Believe that God is with you. "And I will be with you, even to end of age."
- **Preach the Gospel.** The gospel continues to be the very heartbeat of the early church. Miracles only help support the main message of the gospel. It gives is credibility for the hearers.
 - They knew what was most important. They knew and understood that if the gospel was worth dying for, it was worth living for.
 - **Today- are miracles still needed to authenticate the gospels or now does the scripture testify to itself?**
 - We see miraculous things being doing in parts of the world where the Gospel is breaking in for the first time. Ex. Many Muslims having dreams that move them toward Christ.
 - "We can ask God to do anything that would exalt Christ. So whatever our position may be on miraculous gifts, all Christians can and should unite around the fact that the gospel and the preaching of Christ must remain primary."
- **Be joyful, even in suffering,** as God does his work and fulfills his purposes in us.
 - **Joy** was the **natural outflow** of the gospel preached and received and hearts changed, even in the midst of persecution. The church should be full of joy because of what Christ has done for us!
- **Lament for the brokenness of the world** and the suffering and death of those we love.
 - Lament and deep inner joy often go hand in hand.
 - Care for the community around, care for family
 - Honor those who have gone before us and have remained steadfast.
- **Believe that the Gospel is truly for all people,** tribes, and nations.

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

- **What are some current setbacks that churches and believers are dealing with today? How might God use some of these to fulfill his kingdom purposes?**
- **How can leaders in the church be encouraged to keep the Gospel and the Word the highest priority that forms the foundation for the rest of ministry?**

Personal Application:

- **What is there to lament in your life today? How can this story encourage you? Can you pray and trust God that he is working through what you might see as “setbacks” in order to grow your faith and trust him in deeper ways?**
- **How can you be encouraged by this story to preach the true gospel of Jesus Christ and keep that as the heartbeat of the church? What would it look like to be full of joy in the setbacks or in the persecution that comes sometimes with preaching the true gospel?**

10. Simon the Sorcerer

Acts 8:9-25

At the time when the church was first spreading in the midst of persecution, there was a man named Simon, who had practiced magic in the city of Samaria and amazed the people, boasting that he himself was somebody great. The people believed him and thought he had the power of God because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. When he saw the signs and great miracles being performed, he was amazed.

When the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. They came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have no part in this ministry because your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord. Maybe he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may happen to me."

Now when they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

INTRODUCTION: (Ask a pre-story question to discuss in pairs or as a group.)

- **Have you ever seen or heard of a magician/sorcerer/witchcraft? What did you think about it? What does the culture think about it and how does it have power?**

THE STORY: Tell the story and learn it together as a group through many repetitions.

POST-STORY DISCUSSION: Lead a discussion guided by these questions:

OUTLINE VERSION (for teacher to use when teaching)

Details: What happened? To see what truths we can learn.

- **What do we know about Simon? What was he like? What did other people think of him? What can we learn from this?**
- **What happened when Philip came? How did the people respond? Why was this significant?**
- **Why was it important to talk about the kingdom of God?**
- **How did Simon respond? What was he especially interested in?**
- **How did the apostles respond to the news of the Samaritans receiving the Word of God? What did Peter and John do for them?**
- **Why was the Spirit withheld from them at first?**

SIMON:

- **What did Simon do when he saw the Holy Spirit fill believers when Peter and John laid hands on them? How did the apostles respond? What was wrong with his request? What did it reveal about Simon's heart?**
- **Was Simon saved? Did Peter need to know for sure? Why not?**
- **How is it possible that Simon believed, was baptized, stayed with the apostles, and saw miracles and was not really saved?**
- **Was Simon really a prophet? Did he really possess the “power of God” as the people had thought?**
- **Peter's response to Simon may seem a bit harsh. But how was Peter protecting the church?**

Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow (act, speak, believe) are found in this story? Which ones still apply to us today?

- **Repent, even of our intentions.**
- **Baptize. Be baptized**
- **Preach the kingdom of God in the name of Jesus for all people.**
- **Trust the power of God. Don't depend on other powers.**
- **Don't try to “buy” (manipulate) power or positions or other gifts of God.**
- **Do not seek spiritual power in order to promote ourselves or our own agendas.**

- **Rebuke sin** - with love and with truth.
- **Don't assume everyone in church is saved.**

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

- **What things in life do we try to “buy” (or earn by our actions) sometimes because our faith is out of order?**
 - Try to “buy” reputation, authority, respect, position, power, control, comfort, opportunity
 - May try to “buy” these things through my wealth or my education, or through being the hard worker to promote myself - trying make people depend on me, showing more respect or favoritism to powerful people
- **How do pastors and church leaders sometimes put their hope more in the gifts of God than in the Giver, God himself? Are there times in which people want things from God but do not pursue a real relationship with him? How does this story help us to see things more clearly?**

Personal Application:

- **What is one way that you these days that you are focused more on pursuing one of God's gifts than pursuing God himself, the Giver of all good gifts? How does this story help you to see the truth of the Gospel more clearly?**

FULL VERSION (for teacher to use for study in preparation)

Let's look at the details that we observe describing what happened in the story in order to see what truths we can learn.

- **What do we know about Simon? What was he like? What did other people think of him? What can we learn from this?**
 - Had practiced magic, amazing the people, boasting of his own greatness
 - People were amazed, believed his boasting, thought he had the power of God. Was using his magic to make himself look good.
 - Was popular, had reputation of greatness with the people.
 - Shows people are too easily entertained, trusted in witchcraft and magic
 - More interested in his display of power than in his character.

- **What happened when Philip came? How did the people respond? Why was this significant?**
 - Philip proclaimed the Messiah and did miraculous signs, healings. Preached good news about the kingdom and about Jesus.
 - People listened, saw the signs, paid attention to what he said.
 - Believed the message, were baptized.
 - Signs and miracles accompanied and confirmed the proclaiming of the Christ, the Messiah. Even Samaritans were expecting the Messiah. (John 4:25)
 - Philip was showing a greater power than what Simon was displaying!

- **Why was it important to talk about the kingdom of God?**
 - He was with the Samaritans, the enemies of Israel. Showing that the kingdom included Samaritans as well.
 - The kingdom of God is now being proclaimed in Samaria, just as God promised.

- **How did Simon respond? What was he especially interested in?**
 - Seems to respond the same as others. Believed. Was baptized.
 - Continued with Philip, was amazed at the signs and great miracles.
 - But his later actions showed perhaps he was perhaps not sincere.

- **How did the apostles respond to the news of the Samaritans receiving the Word of God? What did Peter and John do for them?**
 - Sent Peter and John. They came to be with them and to confirm the truth of their faith in Jesus.
 - They recognized that the Spirit had not yet “fallen” on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.
 - They laid their hands on them and prayed that they would receive the Holy Spirit.

- **Why was the Spirit withheld from them at first?**
 - The Gospel had not previously entered into Samaria, a new nation of half-cast Jews/Gentiles.

- The apostles, as witnesses of and representatives of Christ, needed to witness and testify to their sincere belief and salvation.
- Whenever the Gospel was breaking into a new region, people, or culture to establish the church, the apostles were always present to help witness the filling of the Holy Spirit. In the book of Acts, the giving of the Holy Spirit always happens with apostles present and when breaking into a new region.
- This way it was very clear that the **Gospel was for all nations** and that Jews and Samaritans, once bitter enemies, were now brothers and sisters, members of the same household of God because of their shared faith in the Messiah.
- God was establishing His church among the nations in Acts. Therefore he wanted there to be a clear testimony to all that the church was established among the Jews in Acts 2, among the half-Gentile Samaritans in Acts 8, and among the full Gentiles in Acts 10.
- It is a huge moment in salvation history because Gentiles are now included in the covenant community.

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit - Summary:

We cannot say that in today's church we should see an exact imitation of the patterns we see in the moments of Spirit baptism in Acts 2, 8, and 10.

- **Does Spirit baptism always follow water baptism as it was in Samaria?**
 - No, we will see in Acts 10 with the house of Cornelius that water baptism came after Spirit baptism.
- **Does speaking in tongues always occur with Spirit baptism like in Acts 2?**
 - No. Not always. Speaking in tongues does happen along with Spirit baptism in Acts 2 and even in Acts 10, but there is no mention of it here in Samaria in Acts 8.
- **Does Spirit baptism require the laying on of hands?**
 - No, there is no mention of laying on of hands in Acts 10, but there is here.
- **Is there a second baptism for the Holy Spirit? Does this story in Acts 8 prove that Holy Spirit baptism is a separate event from conversion / water baptism?**
 - No, these events are not evidence that believers should expect a second baptism to receive the Holy Spirit. No, all believers receive the Holy Spirit when they are saved. Acts 2, 8, and 10 were unique situations.
 - Ephesians 4:4-6 - There is one baptism.
 - Acts 2:38,39 - *Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for ALL whom the Lord our God will call.*
 - Clear explanations from commentaries on Acts:
 - "The spirit was withheld until the apostles could verify the gospel work. In this unique case of the gospel's first moving beyond Jerusalem, the Lord sovereignly waited to give any manifestation of the Spirit until the apostles could be there to witness it. That way they would see and could testify that the Samaritans received the same Holy Spirit given to the Christians in Jerusalem. In this way there could be no question that the gospel was for all nations and that the Jews and Samaritans, once bitter enemies, were now brothers and sisters and

members of the same household of God because of their shared faith. The Jerusalem believers had received the Spirit at Pentecost, and now, at the proper time, apostles from the mother church were there to witness and welcome the incorporation of the Samaritan believers into God's church. We see a similar action in the case of Cornelius."

- "We need to recognize that the apostles are not here establishing a normative practice for the church in all ages and places. Instead, the visible manifestation of the spirit marks the magnitude of the moment in salvation history- the inclusion of Samaritans into the covenant community."

SIMON:

- **What did Simon do when he saw the Holy Spirit fill believers when Peter and John laid hands on them? How did the apostles respond? What was wrong with his request? What did it reveal about Simon's heart?**
 - Offered money for them to give him power to grant the Holy Spirit.
 - Simon's focus, like before his baptism, was still on himself, on being powerful and admired, of having people look to him for special blessings. He was not humble and grateful. There was no real evidence that his heart and life were truly changed.
 - Peter called him to repentance for he saw that his heart was far from God, his intentions were evil and deep down he was full of bitterness and still being held captive to sin.
 - No part with this ministry. Neither the Holy Spirit nor the power to pray for the receiving of the Spirit can be bought. Salvation and the Holy Spirit are gifts from God alone. We cannot earn them or buy them with money.
 - Charged him to pray for God's forgiveness.
- **Was Simon saved? Did Peter need to know for sure? Why not?**
 - Whether he was saved yet or not, he still needed the Gospel. He needed to repent of his sins and hard heartedness and to put all of his trust in Jesus. Believers and unbelievers need to be reminded of this.
- **How is it possible that Simon believed, was baptized, stayed with the apostles, and saw miracles and was not really saved?**
 - False confessions of faith lead to false baptisms. Genuine conversion leads to a genuine change in one's life, to a daily walk with God characterized by ongoing repentance and trusting in the Gospel to give one a new identity.
 - Simon was probably a false believer. He was more interested in the "gifts" of God, but was not interested in a true life changing relationship with the "Giver." He wanted the power of Jesus but did not submit in faith to the person of Jesus.
- **Was Simon really a prophet? Did he really possess the "power of God" as the people had thought?**
 - Simon was a false prophet. While true prophets will direct praise toward God, false prophets receive praise as fuel for their own selfish egos.
 - People were falsely believing in Simon's power until they saw the true power. Christ shows that he has power over the evil spirits and over witchcraft.

- **Peter's response to Simon may seem a bit harsh. But how was Peter protecting the church?**
 - This is the first time the Gospel has penetrated into the world of Gentiles.
 - It was especially important for the apostles to protect the church from false teaching.
 - If he had permitted Simon's approach - to seek power for self while looking like a believer on the surface - it could have caused great damage in the church.

Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow (act, speak, believe) are found in this story? Which ones still apply to us today?

- **Repent**, even of our intentions.
- **Baptize. Be baptized**
- **Preach the kingdom of God in the name of Jesus for all people.**
- **Trust the power of God.** Don't depend on other powers.
- **Don't try to "buy" (manipulate) power or positions or other gifts of God.**
- **Do not seek spiritual power in order to promote ourselves or our own agendas.**
- **Rebuke sin** - with love and with truth.
- **Don't assume everyone in church is saved.** Always preach the Gospel clearly. Every person, Christian or non-Christian, needs to continually hear the Gospel and be reminded of what Jesus has done for them and for their need to live lives of ongoing repentance and trust in Jesus.

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

- **What things in life do we try to "buy" (or earn by our actions) sometimes because our faith is out of order?**
 - Try to "buy" reputation, authority, respect, position, power, control, comfort, opportunity
 - May try to "buy" these things through my wealth or my education, or through being the hard worker to promote myself - trying make people depend on me, showing more respect or favoritism to powerful people
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