

Unstoppable Gospel



Nothing stops our God. Nothing stops His gospel.

Don't write off the church.

Some people already have. They say they like Jesus, but there's no point to the church. As far as they're concerned, the church is a failed institution.

I disagree.

The church is far from a lost cause! In reality, the church is unstoppable because the followers of Christ have been given an unstoppable power—the very Spirit of God. Even more, they've been given an unstoppable mission and message.

Come with me on a journey through the exciting early days of the church. We'll discover what made the early church so powerful—so *unstoppable*. As the Book of Acts opens, we'll see a room full of huddled, scared disciples who were completely powerless and uncertain of the future. But we'll also see these same followers become empowered and effective men and women advancing throughout the world, proclaiming the unstoppable gospel that turned the world upside down.

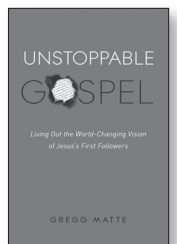
The story of the unstoppable gospel continues today. It is our story as members of the church.

In Christ, we are unstoppable.



Gregg Matte

Gregg Matte is the senior pastor of Houston's First Baptist Church, a multisite church with five campuses. Before coming to Houston's First in 2004, Gregg founded Breakaway Ministries at Texas A&M University, a weekly gathering that grew to more than 4,000 students. Gregg is the author of *Unstoppable Gospel* (Baker Books, 2015), the book that is the basis for this study.





SESSION 1

UNSTOPPABLE MISSION

The Point

The Holy Spirit empowers us to spread the gospel.

The Passage

Acts 1:4-8,12-14

The Bible Meets Life

The early believers passionately embraced the mission Christ gave to the church. Do Christ-followers display this same level of passion today? Fear of offending and being rejected can become more important than love for God and our neighbor; it's tempting to leave to others the mission of making disciples. Still, we're called to turn from our own priorities and return to the mission Jesus gave His followers in Acts 1.

The Setting

After Jesus rose from the dead, for 40 days He appeared to His disciples, showing Himself to be alive and instructing them on the kingdom of God (see Acts 1:3). Although He was preparing to return to God the Father, as He had promised, the disciples would not be left alone. They would receive "the Father's promise," the Holy Spirit, who would be with them to teach them and empower them. As the time arrived for Jesus to leave His disciples, He spoke with them one last time.

What does the Bible say?

Witnesses (v. 8)—A witness gives a testimony of something he or she has experienced. Our English word “martyr” comes from the same Greek root.

Acts 1:4-8,12-14

⁴ While He was together with them, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father’s promise. “This,” He said, “is what you heard from Me;

⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked Him, “Lord, are You restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?”

⁷ He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by His own authority.

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called the Mount of Olives, which is near Jerusalem—a Sabbath day’s journey away.

¹³ When they arrived, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James.

¹⁴ All these were continually united in prayer, along with the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brothers.

GET INTO THE STUDY



10 minutes

Notes



DISCUSS: Invite your group members to discuss **Question #1** on page 67 of the PSG (Personal Study Guide): “**When has something definitely been worth the wait?**” Allow time for each person to respond.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 68):

We don’t like to wait. Chalk it up to impatience or maybe it’s because we live in a world of instant gratification, but we want what we want when we want it.

Two minutes waiting behind another customer at the fast-food drive-thru? Too long. Sixty seconds to heat up food in a microwave? Too long. Fifteen seconds waiting for a movie to stream to your TV? Way too long!

At the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus told His disciples to wait. He was going to give them—and us—an incredible gift: the presence and power of His Holy Spirit. The disciples couldn’t have fully appreciated what all that meant, but they waited nonetheless.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, download the theme song to *Mission: Impossible*. Invite your group members to gather into subgroups of 2-4 people, then play the first 0:30 of audio. Ask: “What comes to mind when you hear this music?” Invite groups to share their responses. Discuss how the early Christians were about to receive an important mission in Acts 1—one that took the gospel across the world and continues today.

SAY: “When the Holy Spirit came, He empowered Jesus’ followers for a mission that was unstoppable.”

GUIDE: Call attention to **The Point** on page 68 of the PSG: “**The Holy Spirit empowers us to spread the gospel.**”

PRAY: Transition into the discussion with prayer. Ask God for a deeper understanding of the Holy Spirit and how He empowers Christ-followers to live on mission.

TIP: Encourage everyone to answer Question #1. A response to an icebreaker question like this one encourages attendees to respond to other questions later in the study.

Post Pack Item #1 to invite others to your study. Display Pack Item #2 to communicate the study topic.

PLAYLIST PICK: “Breathe on Us” by Kari Jobe

STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Acts 1:4-5

⁴ While He was together with them, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father's promise. "This," He said, "is what you heard from Me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Acts 1:4-5.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 69): The life of a Christian isn't hard—it's impossible. Jesus, the One who called us to this impossible life, never sugarcoated how difficult it would be. He also never expected us to live this life in our own power.

- » Jesus Himself lived His life on earth in union with and empowered by God's Holy Spirit. That same Spirit is the secret to the power we need to live and follow Jesus.
- » In Acts 1:4-5, Jesus reminded His followers they soon would receive the gift He had promised earlier: the Holy Spirit.
- » Through the power provided by the Holy Spirit, believers would be able to accomplish God's purposes.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

When have you anticipated God working in a specific way?

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 69 of the PSG: **"What do you find difficult about waiting on the Lord?"** (Note: When appropriate, use follow-up questions to encourage group members to share the stories of those times when they were required to wait on the Lord.)

TRANSITION: These verses carried an important message for these early Christians: something big was about to happen.

Acts 1:4-5 Commentary

Jesus has promised to empower us with the Holy Spirit. Verse 4: After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples on multiple occasions. In one such instance, all of the disciples (except Judas Iscariot, who had committed suicide on the day of Jesus' death) were in Jerusalem. Jesus met with them to prepare them for what was coming; He also commanded them not to leave Jerusalem. Something Jesus had previously taught His disciples was soon to happen in Jerusalem. Thus the disciples were to wait in the holy city for the Father's promise to be fulfilled.

Verse 5: The focus of this promise was the Holy Spirit. Though God's people had known about God's Spirit for centuries, their knowledge was more of a distant awareness rather than a personal experience. In their minds this mysterious Spirit probably seemed to operate unpredictably. Throughout the Old Testament we read accounts of how the Holy Spirit powerfully came upon a specific person for a specific time for a specific purpose. Still, these times were the exception rather than the norm. A special filling from the Spirit was reserved for certain people at certain times but not for all of God's people all of the time. Even so, God had planned for a change. Centuries before Jesus was born, God decreed that one day His Spirit would not be limited to select persons (Isaiah 32:15; 44:3; Joel 2:28-32).

During His earthly ministry Jesus had also told His disciples about God's promise. On the night before His crucifixion Jesus taught the disciples about the coming of the Holy Spirit (John 14–16). Jesus noted that the Spirit's ministry in the world and among believers would include convicting of sin, revealing truth, counseling and guiding, teaching, and testifying about Jesus. Jesus also emphasized that He would have to go away in order for the Spirit to come. Soon, both events would happen—Jesus' departure and the Spirit's arrival.

During His post-resurrection meeting with them, Jesus helped His disciples understand more about their coming encounter with the Holy Spirit. Jesus related it to a baptism, which many of them probably experienced from John the Baptist. But in contrast to John's baptism with water, the disciples would soon be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Most likely the reference to John the Baptist was a reminder of what the prophet had proclaimed about Jesus—that He would "baptize ... with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Luke 3:16). While future believers would continue to follow Jesus' example of physical baptism to identify them as His disciples, they would also experience this spiritual baptism to enable them to live lives of obedience to God's commands. Jesus assured the disciple that "not many days from now" this promise would be fulfilled. Soon all believers would be baptized with God's Spirit. And though Jesus would leave to return to His Father in heaven, the Holy Spirit would remain with believers—living in them—to enable them to accomplish God's purposes.



10 minutes

STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Acts 1:6-8

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked Him, "Lord, are You restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by His own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Acts 1:6-8.

SUMMARIZE THE COMMENTARY (VERSES 6-7): When the disciples met with Jesus, they had questions.

- » The disciples asked if Jesus was restoring the kingdom of Israel. They were expecting Jesus to establish a political kingdom in which Israel would hold great power, as it once did under the reign of King David and Solomon.
- » Jesus didn't fully answer their question; instead, He explained that they'd be empowered by the Holy Spirit to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

SAY: "In verse 8, Jesus laid out God's agenda succinctly. This mandate laid the foundation for the rest of the Book of Acts, which recounts how the early believers carried out this mission."

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 70 of the PSG: **"What do these verses teach us about God's mission?"**

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What circumstances can cause us to doubt we have God's power within us?

DO: Instruct group members to complete the activity on page 72 of the PSG on their own. If time permits, encourage volunteers to share their responses.

ONE PURPOSE:

- » Describe the mission Jesus gave to the disciples and to us in your own words.
- » What's your initial reaction to this assignment? Check one.
 - ☐ I'm in! Where do we start?
 - ☐ I'm interested but unsure of where and how God could use me.
 - ☐ I don't know many people who aren't believers.
 - ☐ I'm still new to following Christ; Someone else could do a better job.
 - ☐ Other: _____

Acts 1:6-8 Commentary

The Spirit empowers us to be His witnesses locally and globally. Verse 6: When the disciples met with Jesus they once again asked about the kingdom they anticipated. Like most Jews, they looked forward to a political kingdom where they would be free from the foreign rule they had known for centuries. But the disciples especially anticipated a future where everyone would again know the power and glory Israel had once experienced under David and Solomon. This was what they expected with Jesus the Messiah on the throne. Now as the disciples met with Jesus after His resurrection, they hoped it was the right time for their dream to become reality.

Verse 7: Jesus didn't reply to the primary focus of their question—their hope for Israel's worldwide prominence. Instead, He emphasized that “times” and “periods” were none of their concern. That was not what was important for the disciples. Jesus noted that the dates God the Father has set are His alone to know. Previously Jesus noted that even He didn't know the specific “day” or “hour” of the end (Mark 13:32).

Verse 8: It was important, however, for the disciples to understand the kingdom that was coming and how it impacted them and others. Unlike what the disciples imagined, God's kingdom was different from all earthly kingdoms where powerful human kings sit on thrones in specific places for a limited time. Instead, God's kingdom is about the eternal, immortal, invisible God ruling in human lives. It is about God's Spirit living in those who trust Jesus as Savior and Lord.

The kingdom of God is about the power of God enabling the people of God to fulfill the mission of God. This power is unlike anything Rome or any other nation has ever possessed. It is the supernatural capability and potential that was experienced in the miracles of Jesus, including His resurrection from the dead. Jesus promised this same power to His followers.

Note the certainty of Jesus' promise: “you will receive power” and “you will be My witnesses.” Jesus' promise was not a statement of wishful thinking but rather one of fact; it would happen. The Greek word for “power” is the same root from which we get our English words “dynamic” and “dynamite.” This power is a gift God would give to His people through His Spirit. His power was not given for their benefit—so they could be prominent or dominant—but so they could be His witnesses. This was also a certainty. Jesus promised to empower His followers to enable them to share a testimony with others of their experiences with Him. With these brief words Jesus didn't explain everything the disciples wanted to know about the kingdom, but He did tell them all they needed to know about the kingdom and their role in it.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Acts 1:12-14

¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called the Mount of Olives, which is near Jerusalem—a Sabbath day’s journey away. ¹³ When they arrived, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. ¹⁴ All these were continually united in prayer, along with the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brothers.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Acts 1:12-14.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 73): What do you do when you find yourself waiting on the next thing God has for you? So many of us just try to stay busy. We fill the waiting with activity. Not these disciples. They went to a single upstairs room and prayed. And they didn’t just pray for an hour or two. They “were continually united in prayer” (v. 14). They waited and prayed for 10 days, until the day of Pentecost when the promised gift of the Holy Spirit finally arrived.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 72 of the PSG: “What are some of the benefits of praying together as a group?”

SAY: “When we pray and seek God’s will together, He will unify us and keep us focused on our common center: Jesus.”

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 73 of the PSG: “What common mission can our group pray for together?” (Note: Encourage group members to identify a mission that is specific to your church and your community. Explain how sharing the gospel in your community ties into God’s overall mission of the gospel message being taken to “Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (v. 8).)

TRANSITION: Praying together with a unified mind and purpose says, in effect, “Lord, we want Your power. We want Your plan. We want You to do Your work through us.”

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

How is praying with others for a common mission different from your personal prayers?

Acts 1:12-14 Commentary

Prayer unites believers in our focus on Christ and His mission. Verses 12-13: The disciples' meeting with Jesus and His subsequent ascension to heaven had taken place on the Mount of Olives, which was just east of Jerusalem (Acts 1:9-11). Luke noted it was a Sabbath day's journey away, or about three-fourths of a mile. This was simply a Jewish reference of distance and doesn't imply the meeting was on the Sabbath. Once in the city, the eleven disciples went to the upstairs room where they were staying. It was likely a large room on the top floor of a large house. The fact that the disciples were staying there suggests it was where they slept and met with other believers.

Verse 14: One thing that became constant for the disciples following the ascension was prayer. They "continually" prayed together. The word "continually" suggests more than just occasional or brief prayers. It pictures them as being devoted to it—they were intense and persistent in their praying. This was an example they had seen in Jesus' life and was obviously important for them as well.

Exactly what the disciples prayed is unknown, but whatever the content of their prayers, the disciples were "united." This means they had the same heart and commitment, which was to glorify God and fulfill His purpose. They may have prayed for unity (just as Jesus prayed for them on the night before His death—John 17:20-23). But certainly they experienced unity as a result of their ongoing praying together.

There were more than just the eleven disciples in that upper room, however. Luke mentioned the women, likely a reference to those who had followed Jesus, had been there at His crucifixion, and had even prepared Jesus for His proper burial. The women could have also included any wives of the disciples. Luke also noted that Mary the mother of Jesus and His brothers also joined the disciples during that time. Mark 6:3 notes that Jesus had four brothers and at least two sisters. These were the natural children of Mary and Joseph, so technically Jesus was their half-brother.

Our priority is to be witnesses for Jesus—sharing the truth about God, sin, and salvation, and our testimony of what we have experienced (forgiveness of sins and eternal life) through faith in Christ. This is what we have been empowered by the Holy Spirit to do. But we don't do this alone—prayer keeps us connected with God so we can receive and walk in His wisdom, strength, and guidance for the mission. And unity with other believers—in fellowship and in prayer—gives us the family we need for support and the encouragement we need to keep moving forward as we work together to spread the gospel.



Notes