

SENIOR ADULTS

# BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE®

FALL 2016 | **LEADER GUIDE**  
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UNVARNISHED TRUTH: LIFE'S GREATEST STORY

UNSTOPPABLE GOSPEL

## GET INTO THE STUDY



10 minutes

**GUIDE:** Direct attention to the contents page in the **PSG (p. 3)**. Review the titles of the six-session study about the unstoppable nature of the gospel. (**LEADER PACK:** Point to the titles on **Item 5: “Unstoppable Gospel.”**)

Introduce session 7. Note the picture on **PSG page 82**.

**DISCUSS:** Question #1 (**PSG, p. 82**): **What is something you have waited for that was worth the wait?**

Direct attention to **The Bible Meets Life (PSG, p. 83)**. Note that Jesus’ disciples were told to wait for the Holy Spirit, who would empower them to accomplish Christ’s mission for His church. Stress it is the same power that is still at work in believers’ lives today.

**GUIDE:** Introduce **The Point (PSG, p. 83)**: **The Holy Spirit empowers us to spread the gospel.**

## SESSION 7

# UNSTOPPABLE MISSION



### ***The Point***

The Holy Spirit empowers us to spread the gospel.

### ***The Bible Meets Life***

Many Christians no longer have the passion of the early believers to take on the mission Christ gave to the church. Fear of offending and being rejected has become more

important than love for God and our neighbor, so we have chosen to leave to others the mission of making disciples. We need to turn from our own priorities and return to the mission Jesus gave His followers in Acts 1.

### ***The Passage***

Acts 1:4-8,12-14

### ***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 (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.

## 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."

*Jesus has promised to empower us with the Holy Spirit.*

1▶ During the time between Jesus' resurrection and His ascension, it seems His disciples weren't certain what to do. While they had been with Him constantly before His death, after the resurrection things changed. Though they encountered Him at different times and in different places, His visits likely were brief and probably left them with more questions than answers.

Apparently the disciples weren't sure where to go, either. After the resurrection Peter and a few others, who had been in Jerusalem, were back in their native Galilee on the Sea of Tiberias (Sea of Galilee), where they fished all night, without success. Then the next morning they encountered Jesus on the shore and ate breakfast with Him (see John 21). ◀

**Verse 4.** There were times, however, when all of the disciples (except Judas Iscariot, who had committed suicide on the day of Jesus' death) were in Jerusalem. On one of these occasions Jesus **was together with them**. This might indicate they shared a meal or it may simply refer to a gathering. Whatever the occasion, Jesus appeared in their midst to prepare them for what was coming. During that meeting He **commanded them not to leave Jerusalem**. While we often think of a *command* as a serious order from a no-nonsense superior, Jesus wasn't being a stern taskmaster. Certainly He had the authority to tell them what to do, but His words were likely more of a special emphasis or highlighted instruction that He didn't want them to miss. He wanted to make sure the disciples remained in Jerusalem instead of traveling back and forth to other places as they had been doing for several weeks.

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.

## STUDY THE BIBLE

### Acts 1:4-5



10 minutes

**GUIDE:** Before reading the focal passage, set the context by briefly summarizing the information in **The Setting** (p. 86) along with the introductory paragraphs in the **Bible commentary 1**.

**READ:** Ask a volunteer to read Acts 1:4-5.



**GUIDE:** Use the **Bible commentary 2** to offer some background about the Jewish people's understanding and experience with the Holy Spirit.

Emphasize "baptized with the Holy Spirit" (v. 5) does not describe a so-called "second blessing" that follows a believer's conversion at some undetermined point. This baptism occurs for every believer at the moment he or she turns to Christ in faith and receives Him as Savior and Lord.

**DISCUSS: Question #2**  
(PSG, p. 85): **How does anticipating a good thing affect your ability to wait?**

*(Alternate: What do you find difficult about waiting on the Lord?)*

**TRANSITION:** "God sent believers the Holy Spirit, but not only for their own benefit."

**2 ▶ 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 had prophesied that God would pour out His Spirit on the descendants of Israel (Isa. 32:15; 44:3) and Joel prophesied God's plan for "all humanity" to experience His Spirit, that is, everyone who will call upon the name of the Lord and be saved (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 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 and carry out His mission of leading more people to become His disciples.

The word *baptize* generally means to immerse or submerge something (usually in water). But in reference to

the Holy Spirit it pictures a flood that is poured out from God—both a covering and a filling (or cleansing). This is an appropriate picture of what God does for everyone who has a relationship with Him through faith in His Son Jesus.

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.

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## 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."

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

***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. For several years during His earthly ministry they had heard Jesus teach about the kingdom of God. However, the disciples were either still confused or simply refused to give up their preconceived ideas about the future that would be inaugurated by the Messiah.

Like most Jews they looked forward to a political kingdom where they would be free from the foreign rule they had known for centuries—from the Babylonians in the sixth century B.C. to the Romans in their own day. 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

## STUDY THE BIBLE

### Acts 1:6-8



5 minutes

**GUIDE:** As time allows, share some facts about Hoover Dam.\*

- ▶ Hoover Dam was designed to control the Colorado River and provide water and hydroelectric power for the developing Southwest.
- ▶ Construction on Hoover Dam was completed in 1935. At the time it was the largest dam in the world.
- ▶ Hoover Dam was constructed with 6.6 million tons of concrete, enough to pave a road from San Francisco to New York City.
- ▶ Holding back the Colorado River, Hoover Dam creates the reservoir known as Lake Mead, which holds 46 billion cubic yards of water.
- ▶ The water pressure near the base of the dam is approximately 45,000 pounds per square foot. The dam resists this force, harnesses it, and uses it to generate electricity.
- ▶ Hoover Dam generates more than 4 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity annually, enough to serve 1.3 million people.

\*Sources: "Hoover Dam and Hydroelectric Power," PBS Learning Media, [cited 3 September 2015]. Available from the Internet: [www.pbslearningmedia.org](http://www.pbslearningmedia.org); "Hoover Dam," [cited 3 September 2015]. Available from the Internet. [www.history.com](http://www.history.com).

Lead group members to consider the tremendous power generated by Hoover Dam, and imagine if all that power were kept inside the dam or perhaps used to power just one home; how ridiculous that would be.

Suggest the same is true for those of us who have been transformed by the power of the gospel. It's not meant to be kept just to ourselves.

**READ:** Ask a volunteer to read Acts 1:6-8.

**GUIDE:** Call attention to verses 6-7. Note that initially, the disciples viewed the gift of the Spirit as an answer to their hopes for a new political kingdom for Israel. But God's plan was bigger than a regional government—a temporary kingdom—His mission is to reach all people on earth with a message that impacts eternity.

expected with Jesus the Messiah on the throne. Now as the disciples met with Jesus after His resurrection, they again asked about the kingdom that was coming, hoping 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. Though Jesus used different Greek words related to time (*chronos* [times]—a specific time or date, or period of time; *kairos* [periods]—the right time or the appropriate moment or season), likely He intended little distinction between the words. 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). Jesus' words are a good reminder our primary concern should not be to speculate if certain events in our world indicate the approaching end times.

**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.

God's mission involves using His people to invite all of humanity to become a part of His family—living in a growing relationship with Him through repentance and faith in His Son Jesus. This mission was to start in **Jerusalem** and to expand throughout **Judea**. But it was not for Jews only. It included the despised people of **Samaria**, considered half-breeds by most Jews. And it also included people in far away lands, Gentiles (non-Jews) in nations all over the globe, even **to the ends of the earth**. Though Jesus' promise was initially spoken to the disciples who knew and followed Him during His earthly ministry, His words are spoken to all believers in all times—none are excluded either from the promise, the result, or the mission.

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## 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.

***Prayer unites believers in our focus on Christ and His mission.***

**Verse 12.** 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

Stress that God's mission involves using His people to invite all of humanity to become a part of His family—living in a growing relationship with Him through repentance and faith in His Son Jesus.

**DISCUSS: Question #3**  
(PSG, p. 88): **What do these verses teach us about God's mission?**

(Alternate: What circumstances can cause us to doubt we have God's power within us?)

**TRANSITION:** "The Holy Spirit empowers our witness, and prayer keeps us focused on the mission."

## STUDY THE BIBLE

### Acts 1:12-14



**15 minutes**

**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read verses 12-14.

**DISCUSS:** Question #4 (PSG, p. 89): How is praying with others for a common mission different from your personal prayers?

**SUMMARIZE:** Call attention to the numbered statements on **PSG pages 89-90**.

Summarize what the author sees happening in the disciples' prayer meeting.

**1. Prayer is primary.** For many people, prayer is a last resort. But prayer was not the last resort for the early church. It was not an item on a crowded agenda; it was the main agenda.

**2. Fear can be a great motivator.** Those who crucified Jesus might come for His followers as well. It was fear, not piety that drove the believers to pray. Prayer is your life when you're scared to death.

**3. Prayer unites us.** The disciples were single-minded, joined together as one.

Jewish reference of distance and doesn't imply the meeting was on the Sabbath. Thus the disciples had only a short walk to return to Jerusalem where Jesus had instructed them to wait.

**Verse 13.** Once in the city, the eleven disciples went to **the room upstairs where they were staying**. Some have thought this might have been the place of the last supper or an upstairs room at the house of Mary, mother of John Mark. But these speculations are neither certain nor important. 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.

The list of disciples is the same as those noted in Luke 6:14-16, excluding, of course, Judas Iscariot. The order of the names is slightly different in the two lists, perhaps reflecting the prominent roles **Peter, John, and James** would have in the church in Jerusalem.

**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 Gospels note that women initially discovered the empty tomb and were the first to encounter the risen Lord. Almost certainly those women would have been a part of this group gathered for prayer. 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.

During His earthly ministry His brothers did not believe Jesus was the Messiah (John 7:5). On one occasion His family even questioned Jesus' sanity and tried to restrict His movements (Mark 3:21). But since they were with the disciples in the upper room after the ascension, obviously something had happened to change their thinking about the true identity of Jesus. We know that after His resurrection Jesus appeared to His brother James (1 Cor. 15:7), so James' testimony of his encounter with the risen Christ may have led the other family members to believe that Jesus was in fact the Messiah.

Though this is the last time Mary is mentioned in the Bible, both she and her sons provide a good example of unity with other believers around the mission of Christ. James later became a prominent leader in the church at Jerusalem and helped the believers stay focused on the universal nature of the gospel message—the invitation to repent and believe in Jesus Christ to receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life is for all people. He also wrote the New Testament letter that bears his name, which provides very practical guidance for living as a follower of Christ. His brother Jude also wrote one of the New Testament letters and may have later become the leader of the Jerusalem church.

The emphasis of Jesus and the example of His followers in the days before Pentecost remind us of what we as believers are to do and how we are to do it in our day. 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.

**SAY:** "When we pray and seek God's will together, He will unify us and keep us focused on our common center: Jesus the Lord."

**DISCUSS: Question #5**  
**(PSG, p. 90): What common mission can our group pray for together?**

*(Alternate: What is it about praying together that unites people?)*

**DO:** Invite volunteers to share their responses to the activity  
**"Lord, By Your Power ..."**  
**(PSG, p. 90).**

## LIVE IT OUT



5 minutes

**GUIDE:** Emphasize

**The Point: The Holy Spirit empowers us to spread the gospel.**

Review **Live It Out (PSG, p. 91;** see text to the right). Invite group members to think about which application speaks most to their needs.

**Wrap It Up**

**GUIDE:** Lead the group to say or sing together stanza 3 of the hymn, "Breathe on Me." **(OPTION:** Distribute hymnals **IN ADVANCE.)**

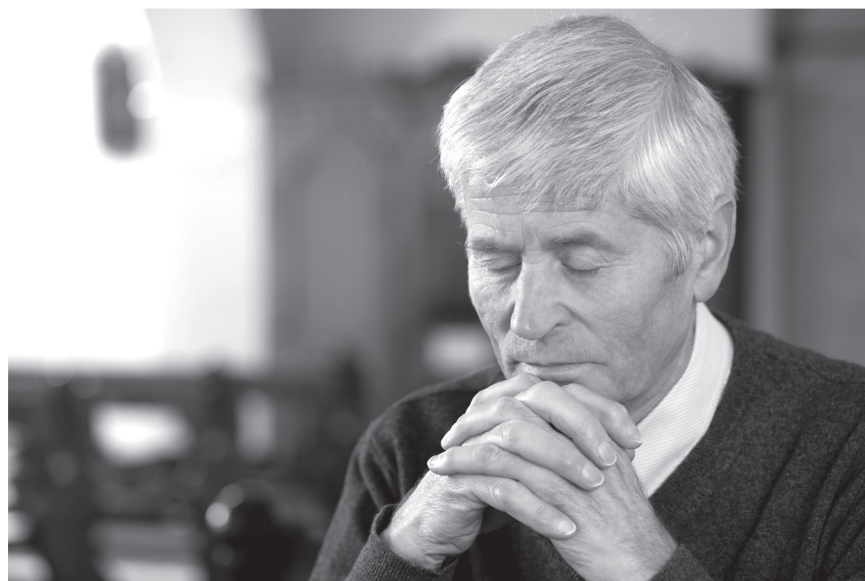
Holy Spirit, breathe on me,  
Fill me with pow'r divine;  
Kindle a flame of love and zeal  
Within this heart of mine.  
Breathe on me, breathe on me,  
Holy Spirit, breathe on me;  
Take Thou my heart,  
cleanse ev'ry part,  
Holy Spirit, breathe on me.

**PRAY:** Thank God for His indwelling Spirit who empowers us to spread His gospel of grace.

## LIVE IT OUT

Acts 1:8 is our mandate. It's mine, and it's yours. It's an impossible task, but we can fulfill that mandate by relying on the power of the Holy Spirit and prayer. How has God spoken to you during this study? Which application will you adopt this week?

- ▶ **Accept the mission.** You may not have accepted Christ's mission because you never have accepted Christ. If that is the case, turn from your sin, and receive Jesus as Savior and Lord. See the article on page 2 for guidance. Then start being His witness wherever you go.
- ▶ **Embrace the gift.** Understand the Holy Spirit is the source of your strength to be the witness God has called you to be. Start praying for opportunities to share your faith. Rely on Him for guidance and power.
- ▶ **Pray together.** Enlist 2-3 people from your Bible study group to meet twice a week outside of your regular Bible study period. Use Acts 1:8 as a guide to develop a prayer list for local, regional, national, and international needs. Get a map and circle specific areas God leads you to pray for. Seek God's will in how to pray, not forgetting to pray for opportunities to share your faith as you go about your regular routines.



## BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR



A Jewish school in Jerusalem where devoted Jewish students study for the rabbinate.

The following excerpt is from the article "To Make Disciples" (Sum. 2001), and can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter at [www.lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator](http://www.lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator). Look for Biblical Illustrator for Bible Studies for Life.

"The imperative to 'make disciples' (*matheteusate*) originated from the verb *manthano*—'learn from someone' or 'come to know.' As Jesus' pupils, His disciples learned from Him about how to live God's

way. Their attachment to Jesus began with a commitment to believe in Him and continued as a lifelong process of learning from Him.

A true Christian disciple is a person given over to Christ in mind and heart. Discipleship requires more than mental assent. The Lord demanded a commitment to live as He lived day by day. Jesus said, 'If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine' (John 8:31). He made that statement to Jews who said they believed in Him. Jesus told them that true discipleship results in more than verbal commitment. It includes continued obedience.

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## SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

***Without the Holy Spirit in our lives, we are powerless to live the life God desires for us. His power becomes available to us when we turn from sin and place our faith in Christ alone.***

Each week, make yourself available either before or after the session to speak privately with anyone in your group who wants to know more about becoming a Christian. See the article, "Leading Someone to the Greatest Decision of All," on page 2 for guidance in leading a person to Christ.

Remind group members that **page 2** in the **PSG** offers guidance in how to become a Christian. Encourage believers to consider using this article as they have opportunities to lead others to Christ.



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