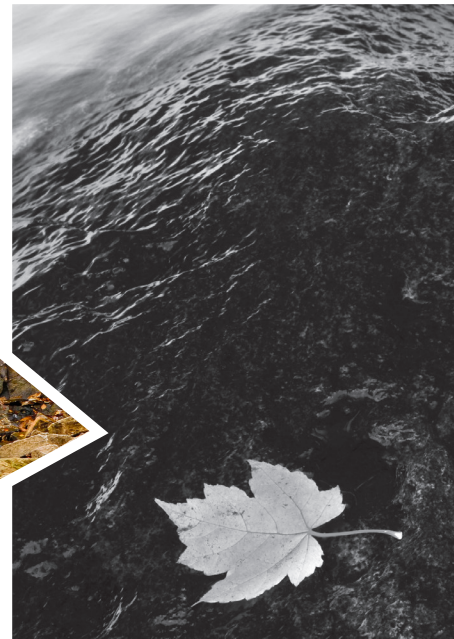


SENIOR ADULTS

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE®

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

UNSTOPPABLE GOSPEL

SESSION 7

UNSTOPPABLE MISSION



What is something you have waited for that was worth the wait?

THE POINT

The Holy Spirit empowers us to spread the gospel.

THE PASSAGE

Acts 1:4-8,12-14

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

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. Some things, though, are worth waiting for.
- ▶ The fine craftsmanship that goes into a well-designed and well-built house.
- ▶ An all-day, slow-roasted barbecue dinner.
- ▶ Finding and marrying the love of your life.

At the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus told His disciples to wait for an amazing gift—the presence and power of His Holy Spirit. They couldn't have fully appreciated all that meant, but they waited nonetheless.

When the Holy Spirit came, He empowered the disciples for a mission that was unstoppable. From their single location, their mission spread across the world—and it continues today.

His gift was worth the wait.

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."

The life of a Christian is not hard, it's impossible. Following Jesus means ...

- ▶ ... loving people—even people who hate you.
- ▶ ... doing the ethical thing, even if it means a relationship may suffer.
- ▶ ... forgiving people who don't deserve to be forgiven.

The One who called us to this impossible life never sugarcoated how difficult it would be. Jesus said:

- ▶ "If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23).
- ▶ "You will have suffering in this world" (John 16:33).

Jesus, the Son of God, never expected us to live this impossible life in our own power. Jesus Himself lived His life on earth in union with and empowered by God the Holy Spirit. That same Spirit is the secret to the power we need to live and follow Jesus. Living the Christian life is only possible with the power of the Holy Spirit living through us.

Before Jesus' crucifixion, He prepared His disciples for the time He would soon leave the earth. He told them, in essence, He would send Someone to be with them always. The Holy Spirit would dwell in them—and us—to comfort, guide, remind us of Jesus' words, give us the right words to say, and fill us with power (John 14:16-21,26; 15:26-27; 16:7-15).

In Acts 1:4-5, Jesus reminded His followers they soon would receive the gift He had promised earlier: the baptism of the Holy

Spirit. The disciples were already familiar with water baptism. John the Baptist had baptized people in the Jordan River as a sign of repentance in preparation for Jesus' arrival. Jesus' followers adopted the same practice to show repentance and to confess faith in Jesus. Just as a believer is immersed (baptized) in water, so the disciples would be immersed in the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost, the Spirit would descend on believers to empower them to preach the gospel. From that moment forward, God's people would be forever changed in how they related with Him.

God began to dwell within His people in the form of His Holy Spirit. It was a game-changer. Up until this time, the Holy Spirit came only upon certain people, like judges, prophets, or kings, to equip them for a specific task. After the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit would indwell and empower all believers permanently.

So the Christian life really is impossible to live—apart from the Holy Spirit. Apart from the power of the Holy Spirit, we can do nothing. But once we receive His power at salvation, we can do anything He calls us to do.

A little boy once heard that if he asked Jesus to be his Savior, God would come live inside his heart. So he asked his parents, "How can God live inside my heart? He's so big! He made the whole world! If He lived inside my heart, He'd stick out!"

That little boy was right. If God truly lives in our hearts, He's going to stick out. His love will stick out. His forgiveness will stick out. His power will stick out.

How does anticipating a good thing affect your ability to wait?

QUESTION #2

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: *martyrs*) gives a testimony of something he or she has experienced. Our English word “martyr” comes from the same Greek root.

God is the loving Father relentlessly seeking His prodigal children. Many people have yet to be won, and He will not rest while they are apart from Him. God sent the Holy Spirit to work through us to continue the work of bringing His children home. Rather than occupying one human body—as Jesus did—the Holy Spirit indwells all believers. In this way, God multiplied His efforts to spread the message of how He sent His Son to bring people to Himself.

In verse 8, Jesus laid out God’s agenda succinctly. His mandate in this verse laid the foundation for the rest of the Book of Acts, which is largely about how the early believers carried out this mandate.

Initially, the disciples had other things on their minds. Based on verses 6-7, they viewed the gift of the Spirit as an answer to their hopes for a new kingdom for Israel. They wanted freedom from Rome, military might, and a political king. But God had something bigger in mind. Not a regional government, not a temporary kingdom, but a mission to reach all the people on earth with a message that would impact eternity.

Jesus told His followers to remain in Jerusalem and wait because they would soon receive the power the Father had promised (v. 4). When they were filled with the Spirit, they would be His “witnesses” telling what they had experienced with Jesus—all they had seen Him say and do, including His death and resurrection. They would do this with His power, the power of His Spirit.

The Greek word for power is *dunamis*, from which we get our English words *dynamo*, *dynamite*, and *dynamic*. The Spirit fills believers with the “dynamite” of God. He empowers His church to do amazing things. By the power of the Holy Spirit, a tiny handful of believers turned the world upside down as the “gospel earthquake” rumbled from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

“Jerusalem, ... Judea and Samaria, and ... the ends of the earth” (v. 8). Jesus laid out a deliberate plan of expansion that begins at home and moves outward geographically to include all people. The

DIGGING DEEPER



“It is not for you to know ...” (v. 7). Jesus corrected the disciples by directing them

away from the question about “times or dates” (v. 7 [NIV]). These are matters wholly within God’s own purposes and authority. During his earthly life Jesus had denied such knowledge even for Himself (Mark 13:32). In denying such knowledge to the disciples, the hope in the Parousia is not abandoned. If anything, it is intensified by the vivid picture of Jesus returning on the clouds of heaven in the same mode as his ascension (Acts 1:11). Neither did

Jesus reject the concept of the “restoration of Israel.” Instead, he “depoliticized it” with the call to a worldwide mission. The disciples were to be the true, “restored” Israel, fulfilling its mission to be a “light for the Gentiles” so that God’s salvation might reach “to the ends of the earth” (Isa 49:6). In short, to speculate on times and dates is useless. The Lord’s return does not revolve around such speculation but around God’s own purposes, and those purposes embrace the salvation of the world.

—John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26 of *The New American Commentary*, gen. ed. David Dockery (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 84–85.

same Spirit who descended on believers at Pentecost and turned the world upside down for Jesus is alive today in every person who has placed faith in Jesus Christ. He is sending you and me out on a mission. He is commissioning us to go, to be His messengers locally, nationally, and globally. In Acts 1:8, Jesus is authorizing us and empowering us to “be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

We live in amazing times.

We can obey Acts 1:8 by hopping on a jet plane and flying to the ends of the earth.

We can carry out Acts 1:8 by sending the good news out to the ends of the earth over the Internet.

We can fulfill Acts 1:8 right at home, because the world is literally coming to our cities. Wherever you go, you are likely to hear unfamiliar languages being spoken: Spanish, Portuguese, French, Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic, Farsi, and on and on. In this “melting pot” called America, we can carry the Lord’s message to the ends of the earth in our own neighborhoods even as we also go to the ends of the earth.

What do these verses teach us about God’s mission?

QUESTION #3

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.

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 ten days, until the day of Pentecost when the promised gift of the Holy Spirit finally arrived.

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

QUESTION #4

Let me share what I see in the disciples’ ten-day prayer meeting:

1. Prayer is primary. For many of us, prayer is neither our primary nor even our secondary choice, but prayer is often only a last resort. “When all else fails, pray.” But prayer was not the last resort for the early church. It was not the first item to open the agenda; it was the main agenda.

2. Fear can be a great motivator. For all the disciples knew, the same people who crucified their Lord might come for them as well. It was fear, not piety that drove the early church to its knees. Prayer is your life when you’re scared to death.

3. Prayer unites us. The disciples were single-minded, joined together as one. Why? Because prayer unites us.

Prayer maximizes “Thee” and minimizes “me.” Prayer says, “My agenda is unimportant, Lord, but your agenda is all-important.” The reason for so much disunity and disharmony in the church is because many Christians contend for their own agendas, not God’s agenda. When we pray and seek God’s will together, He will unify us and keep us focused on our common center: Jesus the Lord.

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.”

Pray—and wait for God to work.

What common mission can our group pray for together?

QUESTION #5

“LORD, BY YOUR POWER ...”

Fill in the blank with what you are depending on the Spirit’s power to accomplish.

For my family

For my community

For the world

For

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.

