



6-SESSION BIBLE STUDY FOR TEENS

Community that Marked  
the Acts 2 Church

**TOGETHER**  
FOR TEENS

**BEN MANDRELL**

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the Acts 2 Church**

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# EDITORIAL TEAM

Kyle Wiltshire  
*Writer*

Karen Daniels  
*Manager, Small Group Publishing*

Shiloh Stufflebeam  
*Graphic Designer*

Chuck Peters  
*Director, Next Gen Publishing*

April-Lyn Caouette  
*Editor*

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# About the Author



**BEN MANDRELL** is the president and CEO of Lifeway Christian Resources. Prior to joining Lifeway, he pastored churches in Tennessee and Colorado. His pastor's heart and immense love for the church continue to be evident as the clear motivations by which he leads. Ben preaches all over the United States and serves as a speaker at conferences and leadership training events. With his wife, Lynley, he cohosts *The Glass House* podcast, which focuses on conversations that point the way forward to healthy emotions and relationships for ministry leaders and their families. He is dad to Ava, Max, Miles, and Jack.

# How to Use This Study

This Bible study provides a guided process for individuals and small groups to experience the uniquely necessary and uncommon togetherness of Christian community. Six sessions of study walk through the applications of life together in Jesus. Our prayer for this study is that God will set new relational expectations among students in local churches and grow a desire in individual believers to personally engage in Christian community according to those expectations.

## GROUP TIME

Regardless of what day of the week your group meets, each session of content begins with group time. Each session uses the following format to facilitate simple yet meaningful interaction among students and with God's Word.

## ICEBREAKER

Group time will begin with an icebreaker activity as well as a few questions designed to help you introduce the session's topic and encourage students to engage with the study.

## DISCUSSION

This section is the main component of group time. The text and questions provided are designed to facilitate the group study of the Scripture and session topic. The goal is to help students better understand the community that defined the Acts 2 church and begin personally relating to each other that way through the local church.

## **PRAYER**

Conclude each group time in prayer. Pray that students would apply the Scripture and session topic to their lives and their understanding of the church. Record prayer requests and follow up in each session.

## **PERSONAL DAYS**

The group times and personal days are paired together to help students grow in their understanding of the topic for each session. Three personal days are provided after each group session. With biblical teaching, introspective questions, and practical application, these days will challenge students to grow in their understanding of God's Word and to respond in faith and obedience.



# TIPS FOR LEADING A SMALL GROUP

*Follow these guidelines to prepare for each group session.*

## PRAYERFULLY PREPARE

Review the weekly material ahead of time. Be intentional about praying for each student in the group. Ask the Holy Spirit to work through you and the group discussion as you point your small group to Jesus each week through God's Word.

## MINIMIZE DISTRACTIONS

Create a comfortable environment. If students are uncomfortable, they'll be distracted and less engaged in the group experience. Plan ahead by considering details like seating, temperature, lighting, food and drink, surrounding noise, and general cleanliness.

Thoughtfulness and hospitality show students that they're welcome and valued in whatever environment you choose to gather. Most students won't notice your effort, but your preparation will help eliminate distractions. Do everything in your ability to help students focus on what's most important: connecting with God, the Bible, and one another.

## INCLUDE OTHERS

Your goal is to foster a community in which students are welcome just as they are but also encouraged to grow spiritually. Always be aware of opportunities to invite new students to join your group and to include any visitors in the discussion. A way to invite someone to get involved or to make guests feel welcome is to give them their own copy of this Bible study book.

# ENCOURAGE DISCUSSION

A good small group experience has the following characteristics:

**EVERYONE PARTICIPATES.** Encourage everyone to ask questions, share responses, or read aloud.

**NO ONE PERSON DOMINATES.** Be sure that your time speaking as the leader does not overshadow students' discussion and questions. Politely move the discussion along if anyone dominates.

**NOBODY IS RUSHED THROUGH QUESTIONS.** Don't feel that a moment of silence is a bad thing. Students often need time to think about their responses to questions they've just heard or to gain courage to share what God is stirring in their hearts.

**INPUT IS AFFIRMED AND FOLLOWED UP.** Make sure you point out something true or helpful in a response—don't just move on. Build community by providing follow-up questions, asking how other students have experienced similar things, or asking how a truth has shaped their understanding of God and the Scripture you're studying. Students are less likely to speak up if they're afraid you don't actually want to hear their answers or think you're looking for only a certain answer.

**GOD AND HIS WORD ARE CENTRAL.** Opinions and experiences can be helpful, but God has given us the truth. Trust Scripture to be the authority and God's Spirit to work in students' lives. You can't change anyone, but God can. Continually point students to the Word and to active steps of faith.

# KEEP CONNECTING

Think of ways to connect with students during the week. Participation during a group session is always improved when students spend time connecting with one another outside those sessions. The more students are comfortable with each other and involved in one another's lives, the more they'll look forward to being together. When students move beyond being friendly to truly being friends who form a community, they will come to each session eager to engage instead of merely attending. When possible, build deeper friendships outside your regularly scheduled group time by planning group gatherings.

# INTRODUCT

You've probably heard many well-meaning church leaders say, "Teenagers, you are the future of the church." You get what they mean, but this is an incorrect statement. You are not the future of the church. If you've given your life to Jesus in faith, you are the church today!

In 1 Corinthians 12, the apostle Paul calls the church the body of Christ. Each member of the church, including you, has a role to play. And each member, including you, is valuable and important to the whole body. Look at how he put it:

*Indeed, the body is not one part but many. If the foot should say, "Because I'm not a hand, I don't belong to the body," it is not for that reason any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I'm not an eye, I don't belong to the body," it is not for that reason any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God has arranged each one of the parts in the body just as he wanted. And if they were all the same part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.*

**1 CORINTHIANS 12:14-20**

# TION

Another way to put it might be, “If a teenager should say, ‘Because I am not an adult, I don’t belong to the body,’ he or she is not any less part of the body.” Your role in the body of Christ today might look different than it will in twenty years, but you are still part of the body. Your contribution is invaluable. You know things and have passions that the church needs today, and in some ways you are better equipped than many adults to tackle the challenges facing the church today. In fact, many of the major revivals in church history began with two key elements: prayer and young people. God wants to use you today; you just have to make yourself available to Him.

Another way the Bible describes the church is as the bride of Christ. A good husband loves his wife and would lay down his life for her. This is exactly what Jesus did for us—His bride—on the cross. This is a big reason why we cannot say, “I love Jesus; I just don’t love the church.” You would have a hard time telling a husband who desperately loves his wife that you’re cool with him but can’t stand her. The two go together as a package deal; so do Jesus and His bride, the church.

We’ve created this teen version of *Together* so that you can see your place in the church today, embrace it and live it out, and grow in your love for the church. Yes, the church you are a member of is imperfect because it is filled with imperfect people—including you. However, it is still God’s one and only plan to reach the world and for believers to take care of each other and live life together as His people. I pray that this book will encourage you and help build the foundation of your life in the church. I also hope it gives you ideas for where and how you can plug in and begin serving in the body of Christ today!



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SESSION 1:

**HEALTHY  
CHURCH**

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# Group Time

## ICEBREAKER:

*Have a contest to see who in the group can hold his or her breath the longest. Give students about thirty seconds to prepare, then count down and have them all hold their breaths. The student who holds his or her breath the longest wins. Provide a small prize to the winning student, like a candy bar or old camp t-shirt.*

Think about the human body for a moment. There are four basic necessities for human life: air, water, food, and shelter. Human beings cannot live for long without these four essential things. Think about these world records:

- Holding one's breath: 24 minutes, 37 seconds.
- Going without water: 18 days.
- Going without food: 382 days.
- Going without shelter: it's hard to tell, but we know that a man was stranded at sea once for 484 days.

You were designed by God to breathe, drink, eat, and find cover. Just like our bodies have specific needs to be healthy, so does the body of Christ, the church. In Session 1, we will talk about the four most important elements of a healthy church.

### **Read Acts 2:41-42.**

*So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added to them. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.*

## BACKGROUND OF ACTS 2

You might be wondering, *What is going on here?* If you go back to the beginning of Acts 2, you will see that everyone in the world who believed in Jesus was gathered in one place, in Jerusalem. Can you imagine that? I bet all the members of your church have never all shown up on the same Sunday, much less every believer in the world today!

Suddenly, something amazing happened: the Holy Spirit showed up and entered each believer. This is the fulfillment of what Jesus was talking about in John 14:15-17. When this happened, it sounded like a strong, powerful wind was blowing, so a crowd gathered to check it out. The people in this crowd were Jews from all over the world. Then, another miraculous thing happened—all the followers of Jesus were able to speak in other languages. That means the people in the crowd were hearing the followers of Jesus speak in their own languages.

The apostle Peter, who less than two months earlier had denied even knowing Jesus (see Matt. 26:69-75), stood boldly before the crowd and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, preached a message that cut straight to the hearts of those who were listening. That day, three thousand people became followers of Jesus and the church as we know it today was born.

**What do you think are the most important elements of a healthy church?**

It's amazing that the blueprint for a healthy church was there right from the start. We can see it in Acts 2:41-42. Healthy churches do four things well: *teach*, *have fellowship*, *practice forgiveness*, and *pray*. Let's look at these elements one at a time.

## **TEACHING**

This is probably the element you've experienced the most in church to this point in your life. From the time babies are brought to the church nursery, healthy churches seek to start instilling biblical truths into believers' lives.

**What are the earliest things you can remember learning at church?**



Why is teaching so important for a healthy church? We'll focus on two reasons:

- First, it models the ministry of Jesus. Everywhere Jesus went, He taught. He gathered disciples, who called Him “Rabbi,” that is, teacher. Jesus came to earth teaching who God is, what His kingdom looks like, and how we, as His disciples, are to live. Healthy churches today do the same thing.
- Second, God’s Word is like oxygen for our lungs. Receiving it is what fills us up, revives us, and powers us to go, do, and be everything Jesus calls us to. In 1 Peter 2:2, the apostle instructs, “Like newborn infants, desire the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow up into your salvation, if you have tasted that the Lord is good.” Being taught and learning God’s Word helps us grow. This is why strong teaching and learning God’s Word are so important for the stage of life you are in now. The foundation of your faith is being built right now, and sound teaching is vital to your continued growth.

**Who has been an important teacher of God’s Word in your life so far? Why has this person been so important to you?**

## FELLOWSHIP

The word translated “fellowship” in Acts 2:42 (the Greek word *koinonia*) means much more than “they liked to hang out with each other.” If you want to see what this type of fellowship really looked like in the early church, keep reading Acts 2:

*Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.*

**ACTS 2:44-47**

That is way more than hanging out in the basement at your buddy's house or grabbing a cup of coffee together. This was voluntary generosity. It was an atmosphere where each person said to everyone else in the group: "Do you need something? If I can meet that need, I will. Here you go! It's yours." They did this because they wanted to. It was what Jesus modeled and taught (see Acts 20:35).

Fellowship is vital at this stage of your faith development; that's why it's often such a common element of what you do at church. It's not just about gathering for a dodge ball tournament or a mani/pedi weekend. It's about forging bonds in your hearts between one another that inspire an Acts 2 type of generosity and commitment to each other.

**Who in your life do you have true fellowship with? How did you develop this relationship?**

**How can we grow as a group in our Acts 2 fellowship with one another?**

## **PRACTICING FORGIVENESS**

Practicing forgiveness is not explicitly spelled out in Acts 2:41-42. But it's there—you just have to know what you are looking for (here's another plug for the importance of teaching). Practicing forgiveness is essential to "the breaking of bread" in verse 42. This is referring to the practice of communion, or, as you might call it in your church, "the Lord's Supper."

Today, we may have a tendency to think of the Lord's Supper as an occasional "add on" to the end a worship service. But these early Christians thought of it as more than that—it was a meaningful, unrushed, and tangible reminder of two things: the grace and forgiveness they had received from God and the grace and forgiveness they were called to extend to each other. We are called to the same things today.

So, how do churches today practice forgiveness? This must be practiced and taught by leaders in the church and carried out one-on-one by members of the church (see Matt. 5:23-24). Churches grow unhealthy when individual members let things fester in their hearts—bitterness grows, and conflicts are unresolved. As James 5:16 says, "Confess your sins, one to another, and you will be healed."

**When have you seen forgiveness practiced in the church?**

**Why is practicing forgiveness like this such a challenge?**

## **PRAYER**

We all know what prayer is: it's simply talking with God. But there are two reasons why it is so important to a healthy church:

- First, prayer is how we communicate with God. We must do this as a whole church—come together at the same time and lift our hearts to God in prayer. This is a huge part of how we worship together as a church. We also do this in smaller groups within the church. Prayer is our pipeline to God. We, as a church, need to hear from God. If the members of a church don't pray together, the church suffers because the most important line of communication is cut off.
- Second, prayer is also our personal conversation with God, and when it is interrupted, our relationships are affected. When things between you and God aren't good, it won't take long for you to feel apathetic or even angry at the people around you. So, healthy

churches must have healthy individuals who spend time in prayer, and this will help grow healthy relationships within the church.

**How has prayer been part of your experience in church to this point in your life?**

**How can prayer grow in importance in our group?**

Notice how these four elements of a healthy church are intertwined. When the Word of God is faithfully taught, it promotes genuine fellowship among church members. Then love, trust, and accountability is created, which leads to an environment where forgiveness can be practiced in a redemptive, productive, and healthy way. This leads to prayer, which strengthens our relationships with God and each other.

It's also important to note, this list of four is not exhaustive—there are other important elements of a healthy church. However, practicing these four areas lifts everything else in the church up and creates healthy, God-honoring people.

**Close your group session in prayer.**

## PERSONAL DAY 1:

# Growing in Learning

If the Lord designed teaching to be a key component of His church, then learning is a critical piece of our growth. But there is no human being on earth who can force you to learn. It's something you must decide to take seriously on your own.

Spending time in God's Word is something many believers run hot and cold in. We have seasons where we're passionately interested in Scripture, and then there are times when it's all we can do to skim a devotional in the morning.

The point of this isn't to shame you into spending time in the Bible. The main question I have for you is: Do you see the importance of it?

**Read Romans 12:2.**

*Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.*

Do you see why Paul wrote that our lives are transformed by the renewing of our minds? The battle begins in our heads. What we put in our minds matters.

**What is one next step you can take today in learning God's Word?**

In addition to your personal study, are you involved in a small group where you're studying Scripture, talking together about Scripture, and challenging each other in applying the Scriptures in your lives? This is important for every follower of Jesus, whether you've been His disciple for years or just begun your walk of faith with Him.

Bible study in community adds insight that a person studying God's Word alone could never gain. There's a natural education that happens when we listen to others reflect on the truths of the Bible and the insights God has given them.

**Are you in a small group, studying God's Word with other believers? If so, what is one step you can take to grow together in your time in the Bible?**

**If you are not in a small group, what is one step you can take to join a group to spend time in God's Word with other believers?**

In 2 Timothy 2:15, Paul wrote, "Be diligent to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth." The only way you can correctly learn to teach others the word of truth is by spending time in it.

**Close in prayer, asking God to grow your appetite for His Word.**

## PERSONAL DAY 2:

# Growing in Fellowship and Practicing Forgiveness

The fellowship of the local church is like nothing else on earth. Obviously, some of the fellowship opportunities you enjoy in your teenage years are programmed by the church. However, scheduled church events are not the only fellowship you can experience.

**How are you having fellowship beyond normally scheduled church events?**

Getting together is an important part of forming relationships, but to grow, the conversation needs to go below the surface. How many people in your church really know you? When I say “really know,” I mean your weaknesses, your struggles, your sources of temptation, your past failures, your fears about the future. You can’t be close with everyone, but life isn’t meant to be lived in rows at church, just staring at the back of people’s heads or just playing games and never getting deep into each other’s lives.

In addition to deepening relationships, I want to also emphasize the importance of laughter, joy, and fun. Notice the text says that the church members would meet up regularly, with glad and sincere hearts (see Acts 2:46). Having fun is typically something that comes more easily to people your age than when you’re older. So I want to encourage you to deepen your relationships with each other by enjoying life together and celebrating what God is doing in your lives.

**How are you making room in your life for authentic life-on-life friendships?**

When we have these types of relationships, practicing forgiveness is easier. Why? Because our relationships are built on love and trust. We've seen it in action because we've lived life together.

In 1 John 1:9, the apostle John wrote, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

As we come before the Lord with repentant hearts, expressing remorse for saying the wrong thing, doing the wrong thing, or neglecting the right thing, we find a renewed peace with Him, and we sense a reconnection. In the same way, when we allow ourselves to be vulnerable with those around us, we can feel the trust grow between us—the knot gets a little tighter, and the loyalty and connection grow.

Practicing this is like letting people into your messy bedroom. It reveals the truth that you're a real person who doesn't have everything picture perfect. You need God's grace in your life just as much as they do.

**What is one step you can take today to grow in fellowship and in practicing authentic relationships in your life?**

**Close in prayer and ask God to help you have genuine relationships with others in your church.**



## PERSONAL DAY 3:

# Growing in Prayer

How does the thought of being called on to pray out loud in front of others make you feel? Why?

The thought of praying out loud in front of others is horrifying to many of us, but in a lot of ways, this is a result of our modern pride. We worry that we'll sound foolish and that other people will judge us for saying the wrong thing. But the early Christians weren't trying to impress each other with their prayers. They were opening their hearts out loud so that others could hear them share the depths of their souls.

When we pray genuinely, we tend to tell on ourselves and let our true feelings pour out. This is why the book of Psalms is consistently rated as the most popular book in the Bible. The psalmists pour out their pain, plead with God for help, and share their disappointment, hurt, anger, shame—all that stuff that keeps us feeling weighed down in life.

**Pause for a moment and read Psalm 6.**

Have you ever prayed like this before? When? If not, what keeps you from pouring out your heart and soul before God like the psalmist did?

One of the bad habits of the modern church is that we talk a lot about prayer, but we often never get around to it. So, let's not be guilty of that today.

**Take a few minutes and journal a prayer below or in a separate notebook. To “journal” simply means to write down your thoughts. Cry out to God about whatever’s on your heart. Rest assured: He hears and He cares.**

Modern science suggests that some human pain is best processed in group therapy. Get this: scientists who study the human brain say that when we invite other human beings into the inner parts of who we are—letting them hear our deepest desires, witness our secret longings, catch a glimpse of our personal crises of faith—in these moments, like Velcro, they mysteriously stick to us and help us heal. We weren't intended to live in isolation, and prayer is one of the most vulnerable, exposing activities on earth. This is why Jesus wants us to pray together.

**Lord Jesus, help me to grow in the habit of prayer, both in my private life and in the life of my church. Help me to always speak to You openly and honestly. Take away my fear of opening my heart to those in my church. Draw us together in You. Amen.**