

The story of God's grace flooding out into the world

BOUNDLESS

THE STORY OF GOD'S GRACE FLOODING OUT INTO THE WORLD

In the book of 1 John last term, we heard that: "What we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may also have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). In the book of Acts, we see this reality playing out in real time, as the apostles take this red-hot Gospel they've witnessed and begin to declare it to those around them.

Acts is the second part of a two-part record that Luke the Physician wrote, the first being what we know as the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1:1-4). Whereas his the Gospel was full of eyewitnesses accounts, Acts is a combination of his research and his personal experience, as can be seen when the narrative changes from third person to first person in Acts 16:10.

Acts is a book that's describing the work of Christ and his Spirit through his Apostles to form the early church. Because of that, we shouldn't expect that everything that happens in Acts is the norm for our Christian experience. But neither should we shut off from engaging with God's work in it, because it's outside of our comfort zone.

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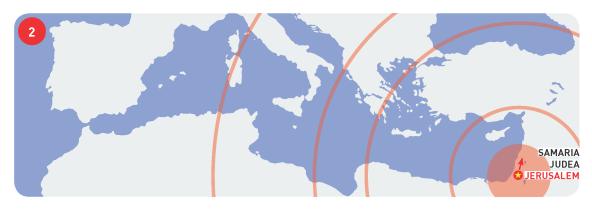
God works outside of the boundaries of our understanding, to draw people outside of boundaries of our community to himself through the message of his Gospel.

In this book, we get a strong sense that the Gospel is Boundless: God is working outside of the boundaries of our understanding, to draw people outside of boundaries of our community to himself through the message of his Gospel. He's at work in unexpected ways to draw unexpected people to himself, through his radical and powerful Gospel message, and through the power and work of his Holy Spirit.

In this book, we hear about the Acts that Jesus continued to do after his ascension, and how the first witnesses to the resurrected Saviour took the Gospel right into the heart of the most powerful empire the world had known. And how the whole world was being reshaped around Jesus, and by his boundless Gospel.



1:1 - 6:7	THE GOSPEL STARTS IN JERUSALEM
1:1-26	The risen Lord Jesus promises his gathered disciples that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on them and they will be his "witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (1:8).
2:1-47	Many Jewish people, gathered from "every nation under heaven" to celebrate Pentecost in Jerusalem, hear the word of God about Jesus. More than 3000 people receive the good news and are baptised as believers (2:41, 47).
3:1 - 4:31	Many of the Jews who heard Peter and John preach the message about Jesus boldly in the temple believe, in total about 5000 men (4:4).
4:32 - 6:7	Despite much persecution, the word of the Lord continues to spread, with multitudes of both men and women in Jerusalem being added to the Lord, including a great number of the priests (5:14; 6:7)



6:8 - 9:31	THE GOSPEL SPREADS TO JUDEA & SAMARIA
6:8 - 7:60	The word continues to be powerfully preached by Stephen, until he is executed by the Jewish leaders.
8:1-40	In God's sovereignty, the persecution of the church leads to the spread of the gospel throughout Judea and Samaria (8:1), fulfilling the first stage of Jesus' mission (1:8). Philip preaches in Samaria, with many locals joyfully embracing the word of the Lord, including Simon the Magician (8:6, 12-13, 25). Lastly, Philip sees an Ethiopian eunuch come to faith in Jesus (8:35-38).
9:1-31	Saul, the great persecutor of the Christian church, comes to faith after being confronted by the risen Lord Jesus (9:17-22) and is commissioned to evangelise "the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel" (9:15). To the shock of the Jews, Saul (now Paul) immediately proclaims Jesus in the synagogues of Damascus (9:20) and the church multiplies, with newfound peace throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria (9:31).

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WEEK 1 WITNESSES

Acts 1

11

After he had said this, he was taken up as they were watching, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

Big Idea: The Acts of Christ continue through his apostles.

Is there anything from the talk on Sunday that you wanted to chat about?

"If Jesus had stayed with us and hadn't gone to heaven things would have been lot better." Does this doubt ever resonate personally with you?

Read Acts 1.

In verse 1, Luke tells us that his first book (the Gospel of Luke) was about "everything Jesus began to do and teach..." What does that tell us about what his sequel to the gospel, the Book of Acts, will be about?

In many ways, 1:8 gives us a broad overview of where the whole book of Acts is heading. Skip ahead to 8:1, then read 13:1, 14:1 and 14:8. How does this suggest 1:8 is being fulfilled (you can consult the maps at the start of the studies for help)?

What is Jesus doing in heaven now (see: 1 John 2:1; 1 Timothy 2:5 for two clues).

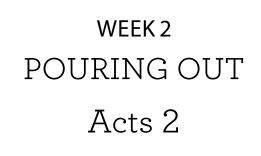
In what ways are you out of step with Jesus' great work as the ascended Lord?

What mission does Jesus give his apostles in 1:8? Is this still our mission today?

"If Jesus hadn't gone to heaven things would have been a whole lot better." After Acts 1 how would you challenge this notion?

Every key event in Acts begins with the Holy Spirit and/or prayer (ie. verses 4 and 14). How can your prayers be more aligned with the work that God is doing in the world through his Holy Spirit?

How can you be helping to make Village a more ends-of-the-earth focused church?



And it will be in the last days, says God, that I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Big Idea: The hope of God, the promise of Israel, is found in Jesus.

Is there anything from the talk on Sunday that you wanted to chat about?

When you hear the phrase "the work of the Holy Spirit", what images come to mind?

Read Acts 2:1-33.

How do we see the Holy Spirit at work in this chapter?

Peter explains what's happening at Pentecost with the prophecy of Joel (vs 17-21). Why? How does it help us understand what's going on in Acts 2?

Joel wasn't the only Old Testament prophet to talk about the future hope of the Spirit. Read Isaiah 32:14-18 and Ezekiel 36:26-27. How is Acts 2 a fulfilment of these promises, as well?

Why does Peter quote Psalm 16, do you think?

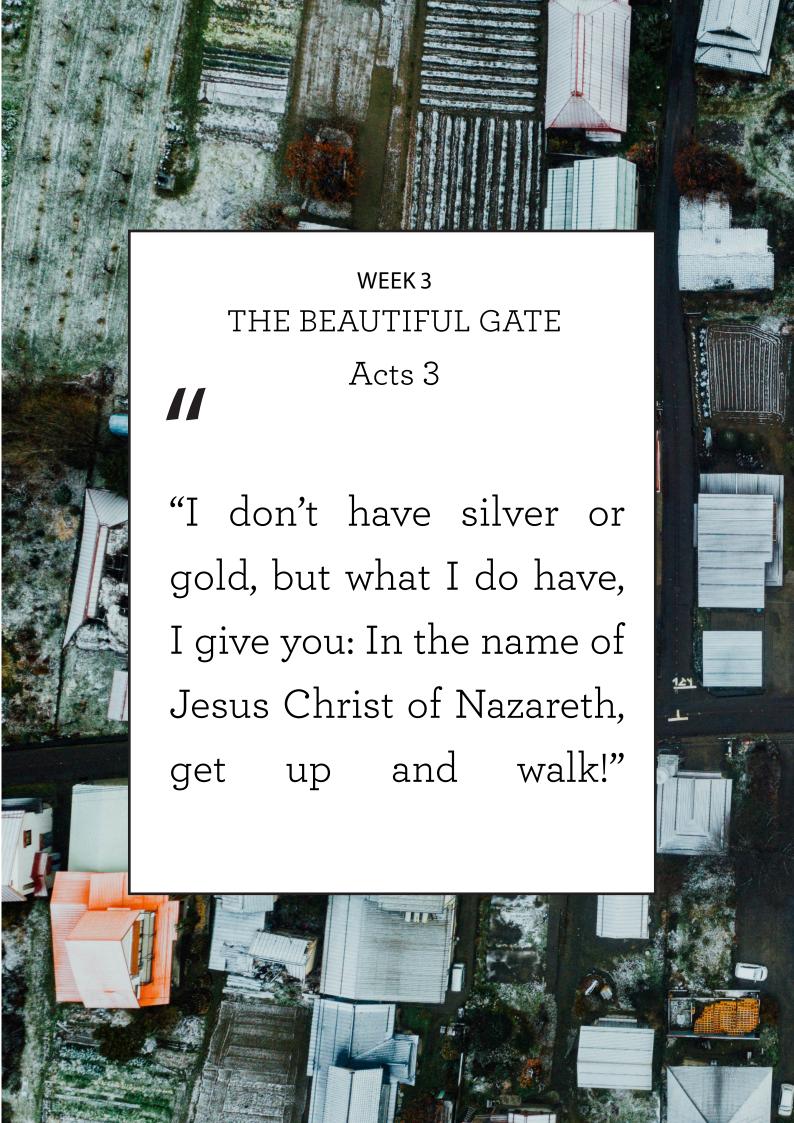
How do people respond to the work of the Spirit in verse 13? How do people respond to the work of the Spirit in verse 37? What should this teach us?

Do you find that you're more often cynical of the Spirit's work (the people in verse 13) or someone who's cut to the heart by it (the people in verse 37)?

At the end of Peter's speech, he says that Jesus is "Lord and Christ". What are some things throughout his speech that give us evidence of this?

How can your community group help you to cling to these realities when you're feeling anxious or doubtful?

What's one thing that you can take from Peter's speech to help you explain the Gospel?



Big Idea: The story of the miraculous and surprising first convert.

Is there anything from the talk on Sunday that you wanted to chat about?

Read Acts 3.

This man was the first person saved into the kingdom by the witness of the Apostles. What does this tell you about the kingdom of God?

Look closely at verses 4-11. Do you see in any similarities between Peter's healing and Jesus' ministry?

What are the different names and titles that Peter uses to talk about Jesus in his speech? What do they tell us about Peter's message?

What surprises you about Peter's speech in verses 12-26?

Look through Peter's speech for mentions of Jesus' death and resurrection. Jot them down here:

Death (verses?)	Resurrection (verses?)	Details

Do you think that Jesus' death or resurrection was more pivotal for the audience to understand? Why?

How do verses 19-20 speak to you right now?

The apostles had just received the Holy Spirit and a red-hot mission from Christ himself, and this was the first man they witnessed to. How does this speak to the way that you see people, and those you seek to love?

WEEK 4 NO OTHER NAME

Acts 4:1-31

11

There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved."

Big Idea: There's one name through whom God is restoring the world.

Is there anything from the talk on Sunday that you wanted to chat about?

Read Acts 4:1-22, paying attention to every reference to "the name of Jesus."

What do the apostles attribute to the name of Jesus?

The last time Peter was facing the High Priest and the Sanhedrin, he denied Jesus and ran away (Luke 22:54). What's different now?

After the elders try to silence the apostles, the disciples pray for boldness to speak God's word (Acts 4:24–30). Do you find this surprising?

How do Peter and John respond to opposition (v. 19-20)?

What do they pray for, in the face of this opposition (v. 24-30)?

A few years ago, a pastor in Egypt was asked how Western Christians could pray for him. He answered: "If you pray for us, you will pray for the wrong things. You will pray that the church will be safe. You will pray for persecution to cease. We are not praying for these things. We ask God for the salvation of Egypt. We ask that he draw millions of people to Christ. We ask that we will be bold and clear in sharing our faith. And we pray that when the inevitable persecution comes... that we will not run away, that we will be faithful in that persecution even if it costs us our lives. Will you tell your friends to pray these prayers with us?"

How do you feel about that response?

The Apostles can be bold because they know that those who oppose the Gospel are no threat to God, who's always in control. How do verses 27-28 give us the ultimate image of this?

What would happen if your community group prayed for the same things as Peter? Imagine a few scenes from your own life this week. How might they play out?



Acts 4:32-6:7

11

With great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was on all of them.

Big Idea: God is still at work in pain and suffering to grow his church.

Is there anything from the talk on Sunday that you wanted to chat about?

Read Acts 4:32-5:11, and compare the two case studies of Barnabas, who was motivated by the Gospel, and Ananias and Sapphira, who were not.

	Barnabas	Ananias and Sapphira
What do they do?		
What's their motivation?		
How does God respond?		
What's the outcome?		

In 5:4, Peter makes it plain that how we treat the church is a reflection on how we treat God. How does this speak into your interactions at Village Church?

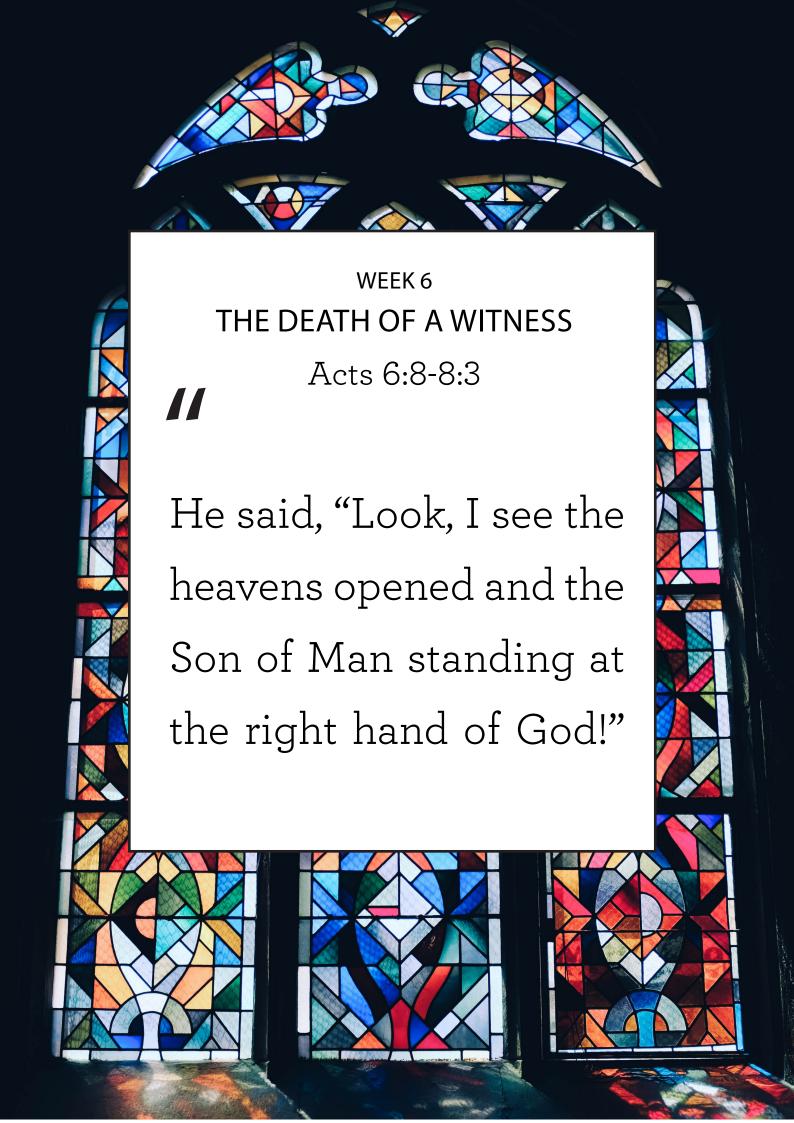
Do we trust God in the same way--in the good and in the hard? Or is it easier to doubt that God's at work in our lives when things are tough?

The miracles are important in Acts, but the thing that it keeps coming back to is the message of the gospel (5:20, 29-32, 42). It's the message, more than the miracles, that grows God's church.

How could 5:38-39 sum up the whole book of Acts? How might this influence where we spend our most energy as Christians?

Triumph for the disciples is not in conquering, but remaining faithful to God no matter what (5:41). This led to great growth in the church (6:1, 7).

What do we see as the wins in our own lives? In what ways do we need to recalibrate our hearts around the Gospel?



Big Idea: True prophets of Christ have always been persecuted.

Is there anything from the talk on Sunday that you wanted to chat about?

Before his death, Stephen tells the story of Israel to show how Jesus is the fulfilment of God's plan to redeem his people, and how even through rejection and persecution, the power of God is advancing.

Read 6:7-15, Acts 7:51-8:3.

How does Stephen attack the religious leaders in 7:51-53?

How do Stephen's closing words (v. 59 and 60) remind you of the words of Jesus (Luke 23:34, 46)?

How can we be echoing Stephen's prayers on behalf of the persecuted church, as well as their persecutors?

We're going to be doing something a little bit different this week: Considering the topic of our passage, we're going to be spending a bit of time as community groups praying for the persecuted church around the world.

Check the Village Facebook group or your weekly enews for the prayer points that our church will be praying.

WEEK 7 BEYOND THE BOUNDS

Acts 8:4-40

Philip proceeded to tell him the good news about Jesus, beginning with that Scripture.

Big Idea: The Gospel flows out to save people who break all the rules.

Is there anything from the talk on Sunday that you wanted to chat about?

Read Acts 8:4-40.

Read John 4:9, Deuteronomy 18:9-14 and Genesis 17:9-11. These passages are all talking about who were allowed to be God's people.

So from what we see of the Samaritans, Simon and the Ethiopian eunuch, how would they each have been seen as being outside of God's people?

"Shame live sin the community, through the community, and feels like a courtroom. It says 'you don't belong—you are unacceptable, unclean, and disgraced' because 'You are wrong, you have sinned' or 'Wrong has been done to you' or 'You are associated with those who are disgraced and outcasts.' The shamed person feels worthless, expects rejection, and needs cleansing, fellowship, love and acceptance." Ed Welch.

How does the Gospel embrace the Samaritans and the Ethiopian man, giving them "cleansing, fellowship, love and acceptance"?

Simon, however, does not seem to embrace the Gospel for the right reasons. Simon's wickedness in verses 18-24 is strongly reminiscent of Ananias and Sapphira (cf. Acts 5:1-11). What seems to be at the heart of his sin?

The story of Simon the magician show that God is the sovereign giver of the Spirit. There are no mechanisms, techniques, or formulas that one can use to manipulate God's activity. Are there any ways that you can try to force the hand of the Holy Spirit, like Simon?

It's no coincidence that the Ethiopian eunuch is reading Isaiah 53. It's clear that the Holy Spirit led him there, as well as leading Philip to him to give him an explanation. Read Isaiah 53:3-12. How can you see Jesus in this passage?

The story of Philip meeting the Egyptian Eunuch feels like an appointment God divinely setup. What is a time when God has miraculously spoken into your life through a Christian, or you've had an opportunity to speak into someone else's life?

WEEK 8 ONE UNTIMELY BORN

Acts 9:1-31

11

Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

Big Idea: The most unexpected and influential conversion in history: Our Apostle.

Is there anything from the talk on Sunday that you wanted to chat about?

Read Acts 9:1-31.

What kind of man was Saul before he encountered Jesus? What does that tell us about God?

How is the conversion of Saul a picture of God's radical grace? How does it give you confidence and hope in the power and work of the Gospel?

What do Jesus' words in 9:4 imply about his relationship with the church?

What in Saul's conversion was unique to him? How much should be a part of every Christian's experience?

Looking at Saul's conversion, what resonates with you the most?

Paul was intent on preaching Christ after his conversion. Read verses 22, 29-30. What are the responses to Paul's preaching?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-11 and 1 Timothy 1:15-16. What do these passages tell us about how Paul later reflected on his conversion experience?

Do you ever fear that you might have sinned yourself out of God's grace?

How does Saul's story – and his personal reflections in 1 Timothy 1:15-16–speak into that fear?

