

ADVENTURING WITH GOD: Following in the Apostles' Footsteps

Reaching Our World

Acts 1:1–11



LET'S BEGIN HERE

In the first chapter of the book of Acts, the apostles were gathered in Jerusalem, waiting and even a bit confused. Would the kingdom of Israel be restored now that Jesus had risen from the dead? What was the nature of the kingdom of God? What did Jesus mean when He said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you”?

Jim Elliot once wrote in his journal, “Wherever you are, be all there. Live to the hilt every situation you believe to be the will of God.”¹ Jim committed his life to sharing the gospel with several unreached tribes in Ecuador. He ministered there successfully for several years with his wife, Elisabeth. But when Jim and four missionary friends tried to establish contact with the reclusive Auca Indian tribe, they were suddenly and brutally murdered by fierce Auca warriors. Incredibly, Jim Elliot’s desire to share Christ with unreached Indian tribes lived on through his courageous wife, Elisabeth. She eventually returned to Ecuador to minister to the Auca Indians—the very people who had killed her husband. She shared the message of God’s love with the Aucas and saw many come to faith in Christ.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. The Adventures of the Apostles

Like the Elliots, Jesus’ disciples knew what it meant to “live to the hilt” as they encountered one adventure after another. Some aspects of God and His kingdom remain incomprehensible and mysterious. But we know this: God dots our pilgrimage from earth to heaven with incredible adventures and amazing serendipity. We don’t “retire” from the Christian life!



Quotable

*The deep work of
the Holy Spirit
in our lives is
what gives us
the gumption to
stay at it.*

—Charles R. Swindoll



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2. Four Contrasts Regarding the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5–11)

The Holy Spirit is not a symbol but a reality. The disciples probably wondered about baptism with the Holy Spirit. But they soon witnessed His presence in all His glory.

The sending of the Holy Spirit is not a program but a power. Before the coming of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' disciples were confused about Israel's return to political prominence. Jesus corrected their mistaken notions regarding the kingdom's nature, extent, and arrival.

The apostles were not just promoters; they were witnesses. God's Spirit soon enabled the apostles to witness to others concerning the power of Jesus. Just the gospel was enough. The Bible never mentions witnesses exalting a particular church; these witnesses always pointed to Jesus.

God's kingdom is not limited; it's universal. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).



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Reaching Our World *Acts 1:1–11*



LET'S LIVE IT

Oswald Chambers wrote in his book, *My Utmost for His Highest*,

Certainty is the mark of commonsense life—gracious uncertainty is the mark of the spiritual life. To be certain of God means that we are uncertain in all our ways, not knowing what tomorrow may bring. This is generally expressed with a sigh of sadness, but it should be an expression of breathless expectation.²

When we choose to let “gracious uncertainty” and God’s serendipity define our faith, we experience His blessing to the fullest.

The Holy Spirit, who possesses the power to resurrect Jesus, is at work in you. Through the Spirit, you have everything you need to be a witness for Jesus. As Christians, we don’t ever retire. God will always have a witnessing task for us. Let’s wait with breathless expectation for His next assignment.

What “new” things do you feel God wants to do in your life right now?

ENDNOTES

1. Jim Elliot, “Jim Elliot,” http://www.theopedia.com/Jim_Elliot, accessed September 25, 2014.
2. Oswald Chambers, “Gracious Uncertainty,” in *My Utmost for His Highest*, ed. James Reimann (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1992), April 29.



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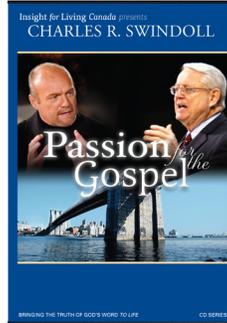
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Birthing the Church

Acts 2:1–13;37–47



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Acts 2 marks the successful delivery of more than three thousand “baby” Christians! It was the miraculous, Spirit-fueled birth of the church. What an adventure! A large gathering of people witnessed the incredible, supernatural power of the Holy Spirit and heard the life-changing gospel message preached by Peter and the other apostles. *Birthday*: Pentecost.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. The Sending of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1–4)

A band of believers gathered in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, waiting for the power that Jesus promised would come (Acts 1:8). Suddenly, in the midst of their prayerful petitions, God delivered those people out of fear and apprehension and into a new kind of community.

They heard something: a noise like a violent rushing wind.

They saw something: tongues of fire.

They said something: filled with the Holy Spirit, they began to speak in languages and dialects otherwise foreign to them.



Quotable

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GETTING TO THE ROOT

The Significance of Pentecost

In Greek, the word *Pentecost* literally means “fiftieth.”¹ The Feast of Weeks (another name for Pentecost) was a festival that the Jewish people celebrated on the fiftieth day after Passover. Traditionally, this holiday was set aside as a time to express gratitude to God and bring to the temple the first fruits of the wheat harvest.

This harvest celebration was the perfect day for the Lord to anoint His believers with the Holy Spirit!

2. The Response of the Crowd

Though we don't know exactly what was spoken in the different languages by the apostles and other believers, we do know their words were filled with the gospel as the crowd of three thousand heard, were convicted, repented, and believed in Jesus that day. This harvest of souls marked the birth of the church.



LET'S LIVE IT

Acts 2 is the earliest reference to what happened in the church as it began. This nascent church, like a newborn baby, needed attention, care, feeding, and instruction. After being baptized, the first great task for these new members of the body of Christ was learning how to worship and fellowship together in a unified way. Acts 2:42 identifies four of the primary purposes of the early church, which also serve as a great way for you to evaluate a church today.

Teaching. Be sure you're in a church that's teaching the Word of God. If you are not, you are less likely to grow spiritually.



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Acts 1:1–11

Fellowship. The Greek word is *koinonia*, from which we get the word, “communion.” The believers in the first-century church shared their resources, came together, and blended their lives like teeth on gears.

Ordinances. Two rites—the Lord’s Table, or communion, and baptism—were a constant in the foundational church.

Prayer. Prayer preceded Pentecost. When the Lord moved in their midst, the believers responded, because they were already praying, submissively waiting, and anticipating His answer.

Like the members of the crowd in Acts 2, have you ever felt the conviction of the Holy Spirit piercing your heart? If so, what happened, and what was your response?

ENDNOTE

1. Walter Bauer and others, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3. ed., rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 796.



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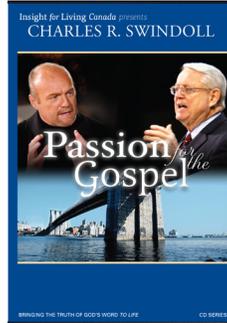
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Touching Others' Lives
Acts 8:25–40



LET'S BEGIN HERE

The apostles certainly had their share of adventure! After receiving the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room on the day of Pentecost, they embarked on the journey of a lifetime. Empowered and emboldened by the Spirit, they preached the gospel and performed extraordinary miracles, touching others' lives as they went. Let's take a look at how they effectively ministered to others so we can discover some positive principles to use in our own lives.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. The Apostles' Ministry

The Holy Spirit empowered the new Christian community to boldly tell others about salvation through Jesus Christ. The cost of this boldness was twofold: the church grew steadily, and the new Christians found themselves hunted down, imprisoned, dispersed, or martyred for their faith.

2. Philip's Ministry in Samaria

In Acts 8, Philip was guided by the Spirit to travel from Samaria to Gaza—from a Samaritan crowd to a Gentile audience of one.



Quotable

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Acts 1:1–11

3. Philip's Ministry to the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:25–40)

When God called Philip, the apostle exhibited a willing heart and a go-for-it attitude, even though he didn't know exactly what the Lord had in mind. Philip set an excellent example of how to touch the lives of other people for God's glory. Here are six principles that we can glean from his example.

Sensitivity: The Lord told Philip to go, and he got up and went. The fact that he *heard* and then *obeyed* shows his sensitivity to God's leading.

Availability: Philip submitted his actions to God after hearing Him. In order to be sensitive to the Lord, we must be available to do or to say or to be whatever He requires.

Initiative: Philip observed the Ethiopian eunuch and then proceeded to strike up a conversation. Philip's question, "Do you understand what you are reading?" changed that eunuch's life.

Tactfulness: Philip waited until he was invited before he climbed up in the man's chariot. He listened to the eunuch's questions and answered them without judgment or condescension.

Preciseness: Philip stayed on-topic, and the topic was Jesus.



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Acts 1:1–11

Decisiveness: Philip encouraged the Ethiopian eunuch to make a definitive commitment to Jesus Christ.



LET'S LIVE IT

Life is full of magnificent adventures: mountains to climb, frontiers to tame, records to break, goals to surpass.

But, the greatest adventure by far that the Lord has in store for His children is the opportunity to touch the lives of others. Think about it: it's quite likely that you're reading this because at some point in your life, someone cared enough about you to share the gospel with you!

The privilege of making an eternal impact by introducing people to the life and the person of Christ is the most significant undertaking a Christian can hope for. Adventure awaits, whether on your morning commute or cross-country flight or even just across the street.

Will you pray for God to use you to touch the life of another?



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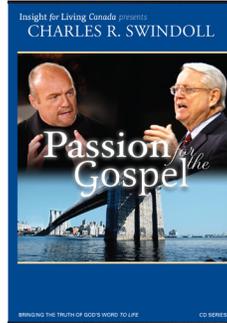
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Being Transformed

Acts 9:1–22



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Alan Redpath wrote, “The conversion of a soul is the miracle of a moment, the manufacture of a saint is the task of a lifetime.”¹

There is nothing as miraculous as the turning of a soul from death to life in Jesus. And the more notorious the person who turns, the more skepticism we tend to have. “Is she *really* saved?” “He’s gonna have to *prove* to us that he is really living for Jesus now!”

From Martin Luther’s reformation to Chuck Colson’s freedom from the prison of sin, God’s mercy and miraculous salvation have been displayed in the most unlikely people. However, no one was more unlikely than Saul of Tarsus.

In Acts 9, Saul was in hot pursuit of Christians located miles away from Jerusalem, in Damascus. Saul was in hot pursuit of Christians, but God pursued him even more relentlessly. Saul’s own words in Acts 22:3–5, Acts 26:9–11, Galatians 1:13–14, and 1 Timothy 1:13 serve as a confession, as he describes his former ruthlessness in stark relief to the great grace of God.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Seven Steps of Saul’s Conversion

Here are seven points that summarize the scene of God’s transformation of Saul on that dusty Damascus road:

A light shone. Brighter than the sun at midday, a blinding light from heaven stopped Saul in his tracks (Acts 9:3).

Saul fell to the ground. Saul had no idea what was happening to him (9:4).

A voice spoke. All those around Saul heard, but only he understood that Jesus asked, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (9:4).

Saul responded. “Who are You, Lord?” (9:5)



Quotable

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Acts 1:1–11

Jesus identified Himself. “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:5).

Saul responded again. “What shall I do, Lord?” (22:10).

Jesus answered. “Get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do” (9:6).



GETTING TO THE ROOT

Saul's "Prodding"

In Acts 26:14, Jesus told Saul (Paul) that it was hard for him to “kick at the goads.” God was prodding Saul toward change even before that fateful day on the Damascus road. Three possible prods were at play in Saul's life:

Prod Number One: Doubt

Saul was a contemporary of Jesus and close in age. It's probable Saul had even heard Jesus speak, marveled at His teaching, and gotten frustrated at His departures from tradition. Saul may have had secret, unspoken doubts. Possibly he could *not* get Jesus out of his mind.

Prod Number Two: Stephen

Saul could not escape the memory of Stephen (Acts 7). He must have been hunted and haunted by the face of Stephen, which according to Luke's writing was “like the face of an angel” (6:15).

Prod Number Three: The Courage of Christians

After witnessing time after time the bravery of countless Christians who were imprisoned, tortured, and killed, Saul must have had a disquieted spirit. This drove him to fanatical extremes. Ultimately, the blinding light of Jesus broke Saul's stubborn will.

2. Saul Becomes Paul

Several biblical figures took new names to reflect certain aspects of their personal and spiritual journeys. Some were even renamed by God Himself. Though his new name meant “little,” Saul-turned-Paul embraced the gospel message with a huge passion.



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Reaching Our World

Acts 1:1–11

3. Four Events Following Saul's Conversion

After Saul's miraculous encounter with the risen Christ on the Damascus road, four events occurred.

Ananias saw a vision. God called a disciple named Ananias to fulfill the vision He had given Saul.

He made a contact. Ananias went to meet Saul, despite his own fears.

Saul formed a relationship. Saul spent several days recovering from his incredible encounter and learning from the Christians in Damascus.

He gave a proclamation. Saul couldn't wait to proclaim the good news, and he immediately started to share the life-altering message of the gospel with others.



LET'S LIVE IT

Don't discount God's power to change a life. Don't write off anyone as "unsaveable."

Remember where you were before the Lord got hold of you. Your transformation as a Christian is due only to the grace of God.

Have you ever kicked at the goads of the Holy Spirit?

ENDNOTE

1. Alan Redpath, *The Making of a Man of God: Lessons from the Life of David* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1962), Foreword.



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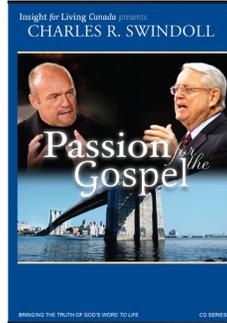
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Prevailing through Prayer
Acts 12:1–17



LET'S BEGIN HERE

God specializes in the impossible. There is nothing He cannot do! Yet, we're often slow to trust Him, even though we know He unleashes His power through our prayers, working miracles and performing serendipities that we never dreamed of. The Lord proves Himself faithful when we seek Him—even in the toughest circumstances and the most impossible situations. God's miraculous power might seem distant or theoretical at times, but it's not. It is real! The Acts of the Apostles proves it, teeming with true stories of supernatural encounters and glorious surprises. In this message, we discover how God used intercessory prayer to perform an incredible miracle in the life of Peter, the fisherman-turned-apostle.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. An Initial Orientation and an Impossible Situation

The events in Acts 12 took place during a time of great turmoil and persecution of Christians. Believers felt fearful and discouraged as Herod Agrippa ordered Christians tortured and put to death. His hope was to wipe out the leadership of the church. Peter was seized and thrown in prison. As soon as the believers in Jerusalem heard that Herod's guards had arrested Peter, they gathered together to pray earnestly for him.



Quotable

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2. A Miraculous Intervention

God heard the intercessory prayers of His people, and He answered with an extraordinary miracle. Clearly, God had purposes for Peter that had not yet been fully accomplished.



LET'S LIVE IT

Paul succinctly summarized the problem we commonly face as fearful Christians; our perspective is limited to what we can see with our eyes. In 2 Corinthians 10:7, Paul said, “You are looking at things as they are outwardly.”

God is not shackled with the limitations of human eyesight. In Him, “we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses” (2 Corinthians 10:3–4). In Peter’s case, the prayers of his Christian community were answered by God in a mighty, miraculous way! An angelic-led escape brought him right to their doorstep.

Not until we come to the end of our own strength does God do His best work.

When He does, we’re usually unable to explain how.

Do you have seemingly impossible situations in your life? When have you seen God do some of His best work in your life?



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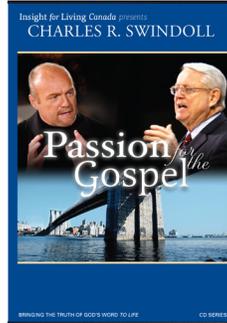
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Adjusting to Change

Acts 13:1–4



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Obedience to God requires openness to change. Webster's defines the verb *change* as "to make different in some particular."¹ Change is one of life's rare certainties! Our habits change. Our living situations change. Our careers change. Our families change. Our goals change. Our lifestyles change. And when any of these circumstances change, we change! We aren't exactly the same people we were last week, and we won't be exactly the same next week, either. With each day and each experience, we grow to become different people.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Stepping Out in Faith (Acts 13:1–4)

Saul, Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen were a band of brothers in the ministry. As church leaders, they had the responsibility of guarding, instructing, and shepherding their flocks. They enjoyed close fellowship. But that wasn't all. They toiled in the trenches. They were defamed and persecuted—together.

In the midst of this fellowship, the Holy Spirit prompted the band of brothers to set apart Saul and Barnabas to the work God had called them to. They heard, they responded, and without hesitation, they obeyed.



Quotable

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2. Undergoing Transformation

Note that we're not transformed so we can follow any path we want. We're transformed so that we may follow the path that God has established for us—that of His good, acceptable, and perfect will. Not only do we *undergo* a radical change when we establish a relationship with Christ, we also should *cause* a radical change.



LET'S LIVE IT

These few verses in Acts 13 present four applications for navigating change.

First, *do not remove any possibility*. Do not put any boundaries around what God may plan for you.

Second, *do not allow activity to dull your sensitivity*. It's easy to get so engaged in doing God's work that you become thick and preoccupied.

Third, *let God be God*. He's the Potter, we're the clay. Keep it like that. You're the one who molds to Him, not the other way around.



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Fourth, *be ready to say yes*. That may mean saying yes to leaving *or* saying yes to staying. Some of us are called to stay put. Don't wait for all the details to be ironed out. Don't fear the unknown. Don't rethink things when hardships occur. Don't try to get all the answers ahead of time. Pray it out.

How has God used unexpected events or circumstances in the past to help you grow in your faith?

ENDNOTE

1. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed. (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, 2007), "change."



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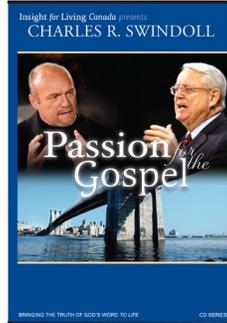
Acts 1:1-11



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