



Learning Inspiration Friendship Evangelism
GROUPS

I'm fascinated by the Acts of the Apostles. It's the only account we have of how the first Christians spread and multiplied during the thirty years following the resurrection of Jesus. In those thirty years it became the largest religion the world has ever seen and began to change the lives of millions of people. Luke wrote his Gospel to show what Jesus began to do and then he wrote Acts to show what Jesus continued to do through the agency of the Holy Spirit in a handful of dedicated people.

I've called this new series, which will take us up to the Summer, *Empowered* because that was the word that was especially given to me in prayer at the beginning of the year. As a result of the Day of Pentecost a small group of Apostles were empowered by the Spirit to change the world so our lives and Church can be empowered today. Once again, this will be taught across all ages of OBC in Kidzone and Academy and in our Lifegroups.

I believe that our Lifegroups play a significant part in the ministry of the church. In them we can share around God's open Word and learn together, we can pray for one another and for God's work in the Church and we can care for one another. As it was in small home groups that the Church first took root and developed it's perhaps not surprising that it's in small groups today we can grow our faith. My prayer for this new series is simply this, that you may also feel empowered in your personal faith and that together, as God's people we will know more of God's Holy Spirit at work among us.

Every blessing,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martin Travers". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Empowered

Contents:

- 1 Acts 2 : 1 - 17 Pentecost (20 May)
- 2 Acts 2 : 42 - 47 & Acts 4 : 32 - 37 Church Life (27 May)
3. Acts 3 : 1 - 20 Times of Refreshing (3 Jun)
4. Acts 4 : 23 - 31 Power House (17 Jun)
5. Acts 8 : 26 - 40 Into Africa (24 Jun)
6. Acts 9 : 1 - 19 Conversion (1 Jul)
7. Acts 10 : 1 - 48 No favouritism (15 Jul)
8. Acts 11 : 19 - 29 Church Growth (22 Jul)
9. Acts 17 : 16 - 33 Unknown God (29 July)
10. Acts 28 : 17 - 30 Unhindered (5 August)

Dates to note:

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| Sun 20 May | 10.30am Pentecost Sunday
6.30pm United Celebration at OBC |
| Sun 10 June | 10.30am All-age with Parade |
| Sat 30 Jun | Ladies Spiritual Pamper Day |
| Sun 8 July | 10.30am All-age with Parade
6.30pm Rooted Prayer Celebration |
| Wed 18 Jul | Church Family Meeting |
| Sun 22 Jul | 10.30am Visit of our BMS World Mission partners |
| Mon 30 Jul | Holiday at Home - until 2 Aug |
| Mon 6 Aug | Childrens Holiday Club |

Prayer Agenda:

Lifegroups are a wonderful opportunity to join in open prayer together. Please always make this a priority in your meetings, even if you have to cut your discussion short. Of course, you'll want to pray for one another, but I also really encourage you to pray for the ministry and mission of the Church. Here are a few pointers to spark your praying:

- ◇ For the ministry and leadership team
- ◇ For the children and youth work, 'Rooted'
- ◇ For our worship together
- ◇ For our pastoral care and fellowship
- ◇ For our outreach to the community
- ◇ For our national and world mission partners
- ◇ For Churches Together in Orpington
- ◇ For our prayer ministry and spiritual life
- ◇ For our church office and administration

'They devoted themselves to prayer'

Acts 2.42



Pentecost

Reading: Acts 2.1-17

Bible notes

Pentecost is also called the Feast of Weeks, a kind of Harvest Thanksgiving, and was a major Jewish festival that brought crowds to Jerusalem. As Jesus had promised (Acts 1.8) now the Holy Spirit comes in power upon the Apostles. Filled with the Holy Spirit they all begin to speak in tongues, on this occasion in languages not known to them, so that pilgrims from other nations get to hear the Gospel. The symbols of wind and fire are associated with the presence of God and the coming of the Spirit. Peter, who had once denied knowing Jesus now stands up to announce that what the crowds see and hear is the fulfilment of prophecy. Pentecost marks the birth of the Christian Church, with the coming of the Spirit which empowers the witness that the Apostles now begin to give.

Sharing together

- What do you think it would be like if the Holy Spirit were suddenly withdrawn from the Church today?
- How is your life affected by the gift of the Holy Spirit?
- What do you make of the gift of speaking on tongues both here and elsewhere in the Bible? (See also 1 Corinthians 14:1-25)
- Why do you think it's important that Pentecost isn't just about what happens to individuals but to the community of God's people?

Prayer

Church Life

2

Reading: Acts 2.42-47 & Acts 4.32-37

Bible notes

As a result of Pentecost supernatural church growth begins and a new community of God's people begins (2:41) In two short passages Luke summarises what he sees as the significant characteristics of this new fellowship. They devoted themselves to the teaching of the Apostles, to fellowship, prayer and Christian hospitality in which they remembered Jesus. There was a deep sense of the presence of God and miracles happened. They made sure that everyone's needs were being met, giving sacrificially and sharing what they had. They continued to worship at the Temple, but also gathered in home groups, praising God together and seeing people saved.

Sharing together

- In your own words describe the fellowship of believers in this young Church.
- Thinking of the characteristics you just mentioned, apply them to our Church. What does it look like?
- The Bible says that 'all the believers were of one heart and mind'(4:32). How do we cultivate that kind of Christian unity today?
- People were added to their number daily. Church growth then was clearly about conversion. What part can we play in encouraging conversion growth today?

Prayer

Times of refreshing

Reading: Acts 3:1-20

3

Bible notes

The Apostles continue to go to the Temple at the fixed hours of prayer each day. At one of the most significant Temple Gates there's a disabled beggar asking for money. Peter and John have no money to give but instead in the name of Jesus Christ they bring about the man's miraculous healing. Jumping with delight the beggar praises God. People are astonished at what they see and Peter is given a fresh opportunity to proclaim the Gospel. All the main themes of early Christian teaching are sounded here including the Crucifixion and Resurrection of the Lord, the need for repentance, the renewal of the Spirit and the final coming of Jesus.

Sharing together

- Do you believe in miracles and how do you think we see them happen today?
- What different kinds of healing do we need in our broken lives?
- What strikes you as particularly significant for us in what Peter has to say?
- What might 'times of refreshing' (3:19) look like for you personally?

Prayer

Power House

Reading: Acts 4:23-31

Bible notes

Hauled before the High Priest's Court as a result of the disturbance following the beggar's healing, Peter takes a fresh opportunity to speak out for Jesus. On their release Peter and John go back to their fellowship to tell them what had happened. Their immediate response is prayer together. Their prayer reflects the unity of their fellowship and it focuses not on their problems but on God's power. The one thing that never even struck them was to obey the Sanhedrin's command to speak no more. They prayed for boldness to speak more and after they prayed they were filled with the Holy Spirit once again and physically felt the presence of God.

Sharing together

- What does their prayer tell you about their faith in the character, power and faithfulness of God?
- What do your prayers communicate about your view of God today?
- Do you think we need to pray for more boldness in order to speak up for Jesus in our lives?
- They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and felt the room shake with the presence of God. Do you think we can feel a physical manifestation of the Spirit's presence ourselves?

Prayer

Into Africa

Reading: Acts 8:26-40

Bible notes

Philip's ministry to the Ethiopian eunuch is the beginning of the witness 'to the ends of the earth' (1.8). In fact, the Ancient Church in Ethiopia today traces its origins back to this conversion. The eunuch, an important official in Ethiopian government, had been to Jerusalem to worship. He was reading Isaiah 53 and Philip now shows him that it was prophetically talking about Jesus. Philip shares the good news with him and the Ethiopian is baptised in a pond of water. There's something quite supernatural about the whole encounter as Philip is guided to the spot, runs alongside the chariot and is taken away elsewhere in an instant.

Sharing together

- What role do we have in taking the Gospel 'to the ends of the earth'?
- Do you think we can also sense the guidance of the Holy Spirit to go to a place or to speak to an individual?
- The Ethiopian was neither a Jew nor a Gentile. He was a seeker after truth. In our culture would you say that there are many seekers and what difference does it make?
- The Ethiopian is immediately baptised. Do you think his baptism tells us something about baptism today?

Prayer

Conversion

Reading: Acts 9.1-19

Bible notes

The conversion of Saul to the Apostle Paul is probably the most famous in all history. Having a 'Damascus Road experience' has come over into our language to describe a sudden eye-opening revelation. Saul the Pharisee was a persecutor of the followers of Jesus, urging on the stoning of Stephen, but now in a dramatic conversion he becomes the leading Apostle of the New Testament. His conversion remains an inspiration for him through all his ministry to come across the world. The conversion of Saul is extended over a few days with the blindness being symbolic of his eyes needing to be opened. Ananias plays a hugely strategic role in courageously going to the house, but is otherwise unknown within the New Testament. The cataracts fall from Saul's eyes, he is baptised and filled with the Spirit. Right from the beginning he is saved to serve God in the mission to the Gentile world.

Sharing together

- What especially strikes you as a lesson for today in the story of Saul's conversion?
- Think about the meaning and nature of conversion. Share testimony together whether for each of you it has been a matter of process or more of a Damascus Road? Does it make any difference?
- Look at the courage of Ananias in this story. Can we be sensitive to the prompting of God to call on people, visit them or have a conversation about spiritual things?
- As a Church how can we encourage and expect more new conversion testimonies in our fellowship, ministry and mission?

Prayer

No Favouritism

Reading: Acts 10.1-48

Bible notes

This story tells of a major turning point in the history of the Church. The Gospel goes to the Gentiles as a Roman Centurion is converted and filled with the Spirit. Before it could happen Peter had to learn that God shows no favouritism. Peter was shocked that God could ask him to eat something that was unclean according to Jewish law. In the eating lesson was a people lesson too; Peter had to unlearn the habits and traditions of a lifetime. Peter shares the Gospel with Cornelius and his household, then the Holy Spirit falls upon them. As new believers they are baptised in the name of Jesus. Peter now realises that God shows no favouritism.

Sharing together

- In any sense do you think we can be in danger of thinking God has favourites today?
- In what ways do we need to grow in relating to people of other cultures and races?
- Throughout the chapter we see Peter prepared to change. Do you think we might be as willing to have our attitudes or traditions so radically overturned?

Prayer

Church Growth

Reading: Acts 11.19-29



Bible notes

Scattered as a result of persecution following Stephen's martyrdom ordinary believers gossip the Gospel. Some from Cyprus and Cyrene come to Antioch and begin to talk not only to Jews but Gentiles as well. Great numbers of people believe and it is here that the name 'Christian' as in Christ-follower is first used. Wisely, the Apostles send the Son of Encouragement, Barnabas, who did what he was so gifted in and encouraged them all. He sought out Saul and together they teach the new Church which becomes a Gentile HQ for their missionary journeys. The new Church could have just turned inwards but hearing of a predicted famine they are generous in an offering which they send to the wider Christian family far away in Judea.

Sharing together

- How do you see the true meaning of 'Christian' being more fully discovered and lived out in a multicultural Church?
- How can we become more confident in sharing the Gospel ourselves with family, friends and strangers?
- Barnabas and Saul not only want to see people converted but disciplined too. How important is that for today at OBC?
- Antioch becomes a mission-minded Church from the beginning. Why should it be a priority for us?

Prayer

Unknown God

Reading: Acts 17:16-33

9

Bible notes

In this passage we see how the Apostle Paul responds to different cultures in communicating the Gospel when he visits a different culture. His travels take him to Athens and there people are worshipping many different idols. With an inscription from one of their altars 'To an Unknown God' he begins to tell them about the one true God. He shows himself willing to communicate with people where they are and to reason with them. When he began to talk about the Resurrection of Jesus a few were willing to listen, some believed, but many sneered and turned away.

Sharing together

- Paul saw the idols in Athens, he calls them 'the objects of your worship'. What are some of the objects of worship for people in our culture?
- Paul uses some of their own philosophy and poetry to begin to share the truth. What might be similar 'hinges' from which we can start to communicate God's love today?
- What do you think this example might teach someone about to go to a different culture in Christian mission work now?
- Some believed but many sneered. How do you cope with rejection or criticism?

Prayer

Unhindered

Reading: Acts 28:17-30

10

Bible notes

Paul has appealed to Caesar and now he comes to Rome at last. In Rome under house arrest and certainly awaiting persecution, Paul continues to share his faith. The words 'boldly and without hindrance' he preached the kingdom of God and taught about Jesus summarise his whole life as a Christian. Though he had every reason to become self-centred he continues to minister to others. You may well ask as you read this passage who was really free and who were the prisoners? Through his confidence in God Paul doesn't give up and finds every opportunity he can. Sadly he recognises that the door which the Jewish leaders had shut was the door that opened to the Gentiles.

Sharing together

- It's easy to be a Christian when everything's rosy but when the going gets tough our faith can get challenged. What encourages you to persevere and not give up?
- There are times when it would also be easy for us to become self-centred and sometimes we probably do. How can we avoid the temptation?
- Think about the prophecy from Isaiah 6 which Jesus also quoted: *"This fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah that says, 'When you hear what I say, you will not understand. When you see what I do, you will not comprehend. For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes - so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them.'"* (Matthew 13:14-15) Do you see it happen today as well?
- At the end of this series now, what does it mean for you to be EMPOWERED?

Prayer

