

PART 2

■ ■ ■ **BIGGER THAN US**



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The Book of Acts

THE STORY STILL BEING WRITTEN

The book of Acts opens with a small group of ordinary people huddled in a room, unsure of what comes next. Their leader has just left them. They have no building, no budget, no plan. Just a promise. By the end of the book, that same group of people has turned the world upside down, and the gospel has traveled from a back room in Jerusalem to the doorstep of the Roman Emperor.

So what happened in between?

A promise fulfilled! One presence. One power. The point where everything changed.

The gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts is the second half of a two-part work by Luke, picking up where his Gospel leaves off. And the story of Acts is the story of the Spirit doing what no strategy, program, or personality ever could.

Jesus is gone. But he's not done. Because along with the Holy Spirit he gives his followers a roadmap: they will be his witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea

and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8) That one verse holds the whole book together, and we'll explore it in three parts over the next three months.

From there, two threads hold together the entire book. The promised Holy Spirit: who shows up at Pentecost and never leaves us. And the mission: the conviction that the gospel is for anyone, and the commitment to share it with everyone.

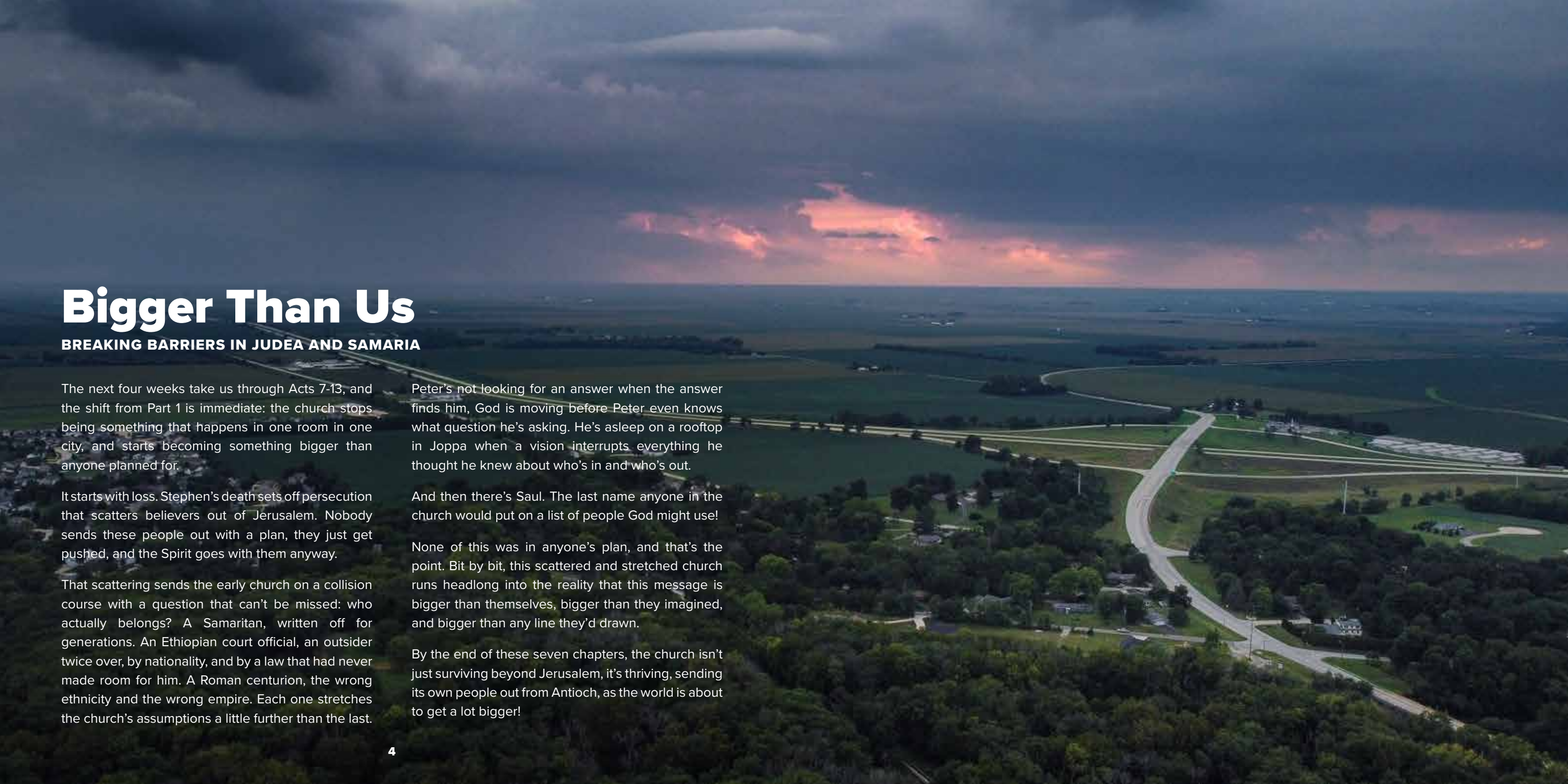
And how does the Book of Acts end?

It doesn't. It stops mid-sentence. Luke hands us the pen.

Because "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people... The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." (Acts 2:17, 39 NIV)

So we ask again, how does the book then end?

To be continued...



Bigger Than Us

BREAKING BARRIERS IN JUDEA AND SAMARIA

The next four weeks take us through Acts 7-13, and the shift from Part 1 is immediate: the church stops being something that happens in one room in one city, and starts becoming something bigger than anyone planned for.

It starts with loss. Stephen's death sets off persecution that scatters believers out of Jerusalem. Nobody sends these people out with a plan, they just get pushed, and the Spirit goes with them anyway.

That scattering sends the early church on a collision course with a question that can't be missed: who actually belongs? A Samaritan, written off for generations. An Ethiopian court official, an outsider twice over, by nationality, and by a law that had never made room for him. A Roman centurion, the wrong ethnicity and the wrong empire. Each one stretches the church's assumptions a little further than the last.

Peter's not looking for an answer when the answer finds him, God is moving before Peter even knows what question he's asking. He's asleep on a rooftop in Joppa when a vision interrupts everything he thought he knew about who's in and who's out.

And then there's Saul. The last name anyone in the church would put on a list of people God might use!

None of this was in anyone's plan, and that's the point. Bit by bit, this scattered and stretched church runs headlong into the reality that this message is bigger than themselves, bigger than they imagined, and bigger than any line they'd drawn.

By the end of these seven chapters, the church isn't just surviving beyond Jerusalem, it's thriving, sending its own people out from Antioch, as the world is about to get a lot bigger!



NOTES

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

4

Acts 7:1-53

2



Acts 7:54-8:3

3

Acts 8:4-25

4

Acts 8:26-40

5

*Re-read
Acts 7-8 in full*

MISSED A SERMON?



WATCH IT HERE!

Breath Prayers

ALLERTON PARK
Photo by Dustin Reinbold

In Part One of Acts, we explored breath prayers, prayers as regular and natural as each breath we take, to help us stay connected to God throughout the day.

As we dive deeper into this practice, we want to draw our attention to not only the frequency of connecting with God but also on what we focus our mind, heart, and attention.

This practice of focusing our attention, reflecting, or pondering is called meditation. The Bible repeatedly calls us to meditate, to intentionally focus our mind and heart on God. While many religions and cultures have adopted their own forms of meditation, biblical meditation is distinct. It is not about emptying the mind, but filling it and fixing our thoughts on God's truth, promises, and character.

Specifically, we're encouraged to meditate:

- on God's law (Joshua 1:8)
- on God's unfailing love (Psalm 48:9)
- on God's works and mighty deeds (Psalm 77:12)
- on God's promises through the night (Psalm 119:148)
- on God's law day and night (Psalm 1:2)

Pondering truth, God's Word, not only connects us to him, but it reshapes our brains. Recent studies in neuroscience talk about neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to reorganize, change, and rewire its neural connections. Our brains create new pathways when we "train" them. These new pathways become strengthened the more that we use them. What once was a new way of thinking becomes our first or "go to" thoughts.



What does all of this have to do with breath prayers? When we regularly focus our minds on God's truth it becomes our "go to" way of thinking, our first response. This practice can literally reshape our minds or as Paul describes in Romans 12:2 as the "renewing of our minds".

Over the next several weeks, continue to make breath prayers part of your everyday routine, as common as breathing, and see how God's truth renews your mind and becomes your first thoughts.

Those who had been scattered preach
the word wherever they went.

ACTS 8:4

 **INHALE** *"Where I am scattered"*

 **EXHALE** *"I will tell of you"*

**DOWNLOAD
BREATH
PRAYER PHONE
BACKGROUNDS
EACH WEEK**



THE SAME SPIRIT, YOUR NEXT STEP



I love reading the early chapters of Acts because this wasn't a church running a giving campaign. It was just a group of people simply doing what could only be done by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit!

As we read the early chapters of Acts, we run into this line twice in chapters 2 and 4, because Luke wanted to make sure nobody skimmed past it: "No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had" (Acts 4:32). No one claimed anything as their own? That line messes with me every time, because if we're honest, that's just not how we're wired. We hold onto what's ours. That's our natural operating system we're inclined to run on. And then you get to Acts and there's this group of people who do the complete opposite!

What I find even more challenging is what happens once the church stops being a few hundred people in one location because that's usually where generosity like this gets harder to hold. It's one thing to help the person who sits down the row from you. Helping someone you'll never meet is something else entirely.

By Acts 11, that's exactly where the church finds itself. The church has scattered out past Jerusalem, past people who share a language or a hometown or a face you'd recognize at the market. A prophet named Agabus predicts a severe famine coming, and the believers in Antioch, many of them Gentiles, a lot of them completely new to this whole "following

Jesus" thing, decide to send help to believers in Judea they had likely never met. "The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea" (Acts 11:29).

That's not a coincidence, and it's not a separate story from Acts 2 and 4 either. It's the same work of the Holy Spirit showing up further down the road. People who never got to see Barnabas sell his field for ministry purposes somehow caught the same spirit anyway.

That's the whole arc of generosity in Acts. It doesn't stay contained to one chapter the church eventually moves past. It keeps finding new places and spaces to grow

That's still true of us! Everything we have belongs to God in the first place, which means giving isn't really us handing something over so much as it's us handing something back... an act of worship beyond an obligation.

So here's the challenge. Be honest with yourself about where you actually are in your own generosity journey. Then take it to God this week and ask him what your next step looks like.

Discover where you are on your generosity pathway, see where each dollar goes when you give to and through First Christian Church, and read more on what the Bible says about money and generosity. Most importantly, take your next step of trust in God through giving.





NOTES

Three stylized, outlined letters arranged vertically. The top letter is 'Y', the middle is 'E', and the bottom is 'W'. They are all rendered in a simple, geometric, outlined style.



Acts 9:1-9

2



Acts 9:10-19

3



Acts 9:20-31

4



Acts 9:32-43

5



*Re-read
Acts 9 in full*

MISSED A SERMON?



WATCH IT HERE!

MT. ZION, IL
Photo by Meghan Fritzsche

Barnabas took [Saul] and
brought him to the apostles.

ACTS 9:27



INHALE *"Give me courage"*



EXHALE *"To welcome the outsider"*

Kenya & Beyond

At first glance, Joy and Alfred have little in common. Joy, a student in Kenya, found herself drawn into the wrong crowd at school that led her down a destructive path. Alfred, a seminary graduate trained for the priesthood, was raised in a devout Christian family and was active in church and his school. Despite their obvious differences, both Joy and Alfred share a similar call to missions. They are two of what the Leonards and the CMF team hope will be many missionaries from Kenya.

As BJ and Mary Leonard approach the three year anniversary of their move to be missionaries in Kenya, their team is pursuing a bold vision that includes new international mission teammates, 75 Kenyan international and cross-cultural missionaries, an ignited missional vision and generosity within the Kenyan church, and sustainable structures to continue sending Kenyan missionaries.

BJ and Mary's work has included training and equipping pastors, leaders and missionaries at Harvest Bible College, providing training for marketable skills and sustainable income streams for bi-vocational missionaries, and working with the disciple making movement that is growing and expanding in Kenya.

The movement that began in the book of Acts is alive and well in every part of the world.



**Find out more about
CMF's Global Sending Fund**



Left: Alfred; Top right: BJ & Mary Leonard with two of their children and Joy, Bottom right: The Leonard family

Acts 10-11

NOTES

THIS WEEK'S READINGS



Acts 10:1-23

2



Acts 10:24-48

3



Acts 11:1-18

4



Acts 11:19-30

5

*Re-read
Acts 10-11 in full*

MISSED A SERMON?



WATCH IT HERE!

SANGAMON RIVER TRAIL

Photo by Crystal Kirkman

God does not show favoritism but
accepts from every nation the one who
fears him and does what is right.

ACTS 10:34-35



INHALE *"God shows no partiality"*



EXHALE *"Give me your eyes"*

IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

Wanda's life and decisions have been guided by this simple statement. When hearing about the mission of GO Ministries, the mission organization First Christian Church partners with, she knew that the Dominican Republic trip aligned perfectly with her mission. Of course, true to her mission, she wasn't going alone. For each of her grandchildren she does a trip with them when they turn 13 and this past year was Lucy's turn.

While both were uncertain about this experience, one of Lucy and Wanda's biggest concerns was the language. Neither of them was fluent in Spanish, a barrier to building relationships and making connections. Despite these concerns, they soon found that because of GO Ministries' commitment to relationships, the people they visited were excited to see them.

The First Christian missions team had the privilege of returning to Pastor Miguel's community where the team had served during the 2025 trip. The team brought a variety of activities including jewelry making supplies. Wanda noticed a mother and her daughters hesitant to engage with the group. Wanda made her a ring and went up to give her this gift. Through the team's translator, Adriana, Wanda found out the mother, Melisa, also made jewelry. She taught Wanda how to make a bracelet and sent her kids to get the supplies to finish the bracelet. Being on a tight schedule, the team

had to leave before Melisa could give Wanda the bracelet. Wanda left disheartened because that bracelet symbolized so much more than jewelry. It represented a relationship.

The rest of the trip held so many special moments, including Lucy getting baptized and creating lifelong friendships. Wanda and Lucy left the Dominican Republic both wanting to return for the next trip.

Wanda came home to receive a note in the mail from Adriana:

"Dear Mrs. Wanda. One of my highlights during my trip was to see you connect with Melisa. To see you both enjoying time and learning from each other even though you spoke different languages. There is such a beauty to recognize and see how we all become one family in Christ. Pastor Miguel gave me the bracelet and told me that Melisa is now attending church on Sundays. Thank you for serving in the Dominican Republic. I send you a big hug. - Adriana"

As she reflected on all that she experienced in the Dominican Republic, God impressed on Wanda's heart that "You don't have to speak their language for them to hear the love of Jesus." More than ever, she is committed to investing in relationships at home, in her community, and around the world.

From left: Wanda Timmons, Lucy Timmons,
and Pastor Adam Hamerlinck

Acts 12-13

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

Acts 12:1-25

Acts 13:1-3

Acts 13:4-12

Acts 13:13-52

 *Re-read
Acts 12-13 in full*

MISSED A SERMON?



WATCH IT HERE!

Now I know without a
doubt that the Lord has sent
his angel and rescued me.

ACTS 12:11



INHALE *"Now I know"*



EXHALE *"You are with me"*



WANT TO KNOW

What's Happening

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