

# ACTS IN EASTER

## Online Small Group Facilitators Guide and Curriculum

*A Program of*



CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL  
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# Acts in Easter

## Online Small Group Facilitation Guide & Curriculum

A Program of Christ Church Cathedral, Houston

### How to Use this Curriculum in Easter 2020

#### Acts in Easter Online Small Group Facilitation Guide

##### Acts in Easter Online Small Group Curriculum:

Session One: A Violent Wind

Acts 1:1-4:31

Session Two: Sharing and Serving

Acts 4:32-8:40

Session Three: Peter and Paul

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# How to Use this Curriculum in Easter 2020

Lent and Easter 2020 have brought unpreceded challenges to the church. Many churches are rapidly adapting to online community building. This curriculum is meant to be a tool to help build and strengthen community in this time of unpredictability.

Why Acts? We read the Acts of the Apostles together because Acts is about how the church became the church in an unpreceded and unpredictable time. Even more importantly, Acts is about how the Holy Spirit shows up for a group of scared and uncertain disciples. The Holy Spirit is showing up, even now. By attending to how the Spirit has worked in the past, we can better discern the Spirit's comforting and life-giving presence in the present.

The Acts in Easter Reading Plan begins on the Second Sunday of Easter, which in 2020 is April 19th. Instruct participants to begin reading that day. You may wish to distribute this reading list to the whole parish, not just those who are participating in small groups.

The Acts in Easter Online Small Group Sessions begin anytime in Easter 3 and continue into the first week of Pentecost. The small groups will discuss the previous week's reading.

The Acts in Easter Prayer Practices are designed for simplicity and at-home use. As always, the perfect is the enemy of the good: encourage, encourage, encourage. The Spirit works best when we are listening and working in concert together. Like the reading plan, these practices can be distributed to those who are not participating in a small group.

This curriculum is written by our Canon for Welcome and Evangelism, the Rev. Becky Zartman. The curriculum, especially the Online Facilitator's Guide, is greatly indebted to Becky's previous work with the Society of Saint John the Evangelist and Lifelong Learning at Virginia Theological Seminary. If you have questions, you can reach Becky at [bzartman@christchurchcathedral.org](mailto:bzartman@christchurchcathedral.org).

Reading Scripture, prayer practices, and small groups can and will change your life, and the life of your community. We need them now more than ever.

Blessed Eastertide to you,

The Very Rev. Barkley S. Thompson, Dean  
Christ Church Cathedral, Houston

# Acts in Easter

## Online Small Group Facilitation Guide

### 1 ) How to be a good facilitator

If you've never been a small group facilitator before, take some time to reflect on the good small group discussions that you've had in the past. Many of them had been facilitated by someone who helped shepherd the group during that conversation.

Generally, good facilitators:

- Carefully prepare for each session.
- Are familiar with the discussion material: "Let me rephrase the question a different way..." but need not be experts!
- Invite others into the conversation: "Would anyone who hasn't yet shared like to share?"
- Are perceptive to non-verbal cues: "It looks like Sam is trying to say something."
- Get the conversation out of the head and into the heart: "What does ... have to do with your relationship with God?" or "How does it make you feel that ...?"
- Open the conversation back up: "What do others think?"
- Engage introverts: "Just a reminder: if you always speak, count to three before speaking. If you never speak, don't stop to count!" or "We're going to take a minute of silence to think about the question, and then we'll share."
- Refocus the question: "I was wondering if anyone had any thoughts about the topic at hand."
- Claim their authority as facilitator: "I'm sorry, but we don't interrupt one another. Not interrupting is part of our group's norms."
- Watch the time: "This is a great discussion, but it's time for check-out."
- Know when it's time to call in pastoral care back-up. When in doubt, please check in with a member of the clergy or the Minister for Pastoral Care.

While the best training for small group facilitation is being a part of a well-functioning small group in the past, this is not a requirement.

Remember: good facilitation isn't about knowing everything about the content, but rather the ability to facilitate meaningful conversation.

### 2) Communicate with your small group

Communication is key to consistent participation in small groups.

Best practices include:

- Sending reminders two days before you meet, and the day of the meeting.

- Including clear instructions on when and how to meet. On platforms like Zoom, you'll be able to copy and paste the Zoom invitation into an email. You may want to use a calendar invitation as well. *Note: Do not publicly post your small group's login information to avoid online harassment.*
- Setting up some kind of way for the group to communicate with each other throughout the week. Some may prefer an email group, others may prefer texting.

### 3) Establish group norms

Because this is only a six-session small group experience, we recommended establishing the following norms during the first session. Your small group will know what's best for itself and may wish to change these norms, but these are well-established practices for fruitful small group discussion:

- Arrive on time.
- Silence other mobile devices.
- Mute your microphone unless you are talking.
- Respect the other small group participants. Don't interrupt or talk over another participant. Don't dominate the conversation.
- Keep confidence: Don't share a story or other personal information from another group member unless you've specifically asked that person for permission.

Facilitators should feel empowered to reference the group's norms if a behavior is becoming a distraction.

### 4) Keep a consistent pattern each week:

Here is a tried-and-true "ordo" for online small groups:

#### (5 Minutes) PRAYER:

Open with the designated prayer for your week and a time of open prayer requests. More instructions in small group session guides.

#### (10 Minutes) CHECK-IN:

Check-in is a time for the group to reconnect about their past week. Check-in is different from small group discussion; the point of check in is to invite each person to share their own answer to the check-in prompt. Because this is not a regular discussion, the process of mutual invitation is a useful way to do check in.

Here is the process of mutual invitation:

- The facilitator states the question and invites a participant to answer.
- When the participant is done answering, that participant invites another participant to answer
- The participant may choose to either "pass for now" in which case they should be called on after everyone else has gone; or "pass for good" which means they will not answer that question. The passing participant should still invite another participant to answer the question.
- Continue until everyone has been given an opportunity to speak.

#### (40 Minutes) DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The purpose of a small group is relationship with others and with God. The foundation for these relationships is open, creative, and life-giving conversation. There are many discussion questions provided in the facilitators guide for each week. Before the session, review the questions and think about the questions that would resound with this particular small group first.

The small group may get “stuck” on one question, but if the conversation is fruitful and everyone is participating, a conversation centered around one question is just as good as moving through all of the questions.

Sometimes, the facilitator will have to ask some follow-up questions to keep the conversation going. Here are some helpful follow-up questions:

- How did that make you feel?
- Tell us more about that.
- What made you think of that?

It is the facilitator’s job to shepherd the conversation if one person is dominating, or if a few people are not participating. Invite those who haven’t spoken to speak.

#### (5 minutes) WRAP UP/WEEKLY PRACTICE:

Present the weekly practice hand out at this time, answer questions, and make announcements about next week to the group.

#### 5) Pray for your small group

The facilitator should pray daily for each individual of the small group before the group starts meeting, continuing until the last session. This does make a difference. Please pray for them.

#### 6) Ask for help!

If you have questions about content or facilitation, please reach out to Canon Zartman at [bzartman@christchurchcathedral.org](mailto:bzartman@christchurchcathedral.org). She would love to help you.

# Session One: A Violent Wind

## Acts 1:1-4:31

### Online Small Group Facilitator Guide

#### Set up:

- Sign in to your video conferencing platform 15 minutes before the session is slated to begin. Ensure that your camera and microphone are working properly.
- Have the Small Group Curriculum Session within easy reach: either printed, or on another screen.

#### What you need:

- Bible
- Solid Internet Connectivity

#### Introductions (10)

Since this is the first time your group is gathering, at the beginning of the session ask them to introduce themselves with their name, how they are connected to your community, and why they are participating in your small group. Since this is the very beginning of the session, the facilitator should take the lead and call on participants to introduce themselves.

#### Gathering Prayer (5)

Next, orient the participants to the order of the session. (For instance, something like: “We’re going to pray, and then set norms, and start our small group discussion” would be appropriate.) Then ask for prayer requests.

Some facilitators will be comfortable extemporaneously praying for others. Some facilitators will not. If you do not feel comfortable, you can always pray this prayer:

*Holy Spirit, we give you thanks for our time together today. We especially give you thanks for \_\_\_\_\_ . We also bring before you the cares and concerns of our hearts, including \_\_\_\_\_. We ask that you be with us, and that you open our hearts, souls and minds to your word and your love. We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.*

#### Setting Group Norms (10)

Because this is only a six-session small group experience, we recommended the following norms. Your small group will know what’s best for itself and may wish to change these norms, but these are well-established practices for fruitful small group discussion.

Read each norm and have a discussion about whether these are reasonable for the life of your small group. If they are not, adjust the norm as necessary. After the session, email a copy of your agreed-upon norms to every member of the small group.

- Arrive on time.
- Silence other mobile devices.
- Mute your microphone unless you are talking.
- Respect the other small group participants. Don't interrupt or talk over another participant. Don't dominate the conversation.
- Keep confidence: Don't share a story or other personal information from another group member unless you've specifically asked that person for permission.

Facilitators should feel empowered to reference the group's norms if a behavior is becoming a distraction.

### Small Group Conversation (30)

Facilitators should be ready to very generally remind participants of what they read this week.

Acts 1:1-1:26	Prologue, Ascension, Matthias Chosen
Acts 2:1-13	Coming of the Holy Spirit
Acts 2:14-36	Peter Addresses Crowd
Acts 2:37-47	First 3,000 Converts, Common Life Among Believers
Acts 3:1-26	Peter Heals a Beggar and Preaches
Acts 4:1-22	Peter and John Before the Council
Acts 4:23-31	The Believers Pray for Boldness

Open the small group conversation with the following question:

- *What surprised you in the reading this week?*

After the opening question has been discussed, choose any of the following questions to discuss with your small group. The facilitator should use their best judgment to select the questions that they believe will elicit meaningful conversation for your context. The small group may spend the entire time on one question, or do several. How many questions the group moves through is less important than fruitful conversation for the group.

- *In the prologue to Acts, Jesus "ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father." (1:4) Has there been a time in your life when you had to wait for a promise to be fulfilled? What was that experience like? How was God with you in the waiting?*
- *Sometimes the Spirit comes with a violent wind and tongues of flame, (2:1-14) but usually the Spirit is a little less showy. Have you ever felt or heard the quiet voice of the Spirit in your own life?*

- After the Spirit rested on the apostles, Peter makes a speech which he makes the point that “This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses.” (2:32) In this Easter season, how have you witnessed resurrection, or how have you been witness to resurrection?
- After the three thousand were baptized, Luke writes, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” (2:42) Talk about how Christian formation through learning and worship has shaped your life.
- In 3:1-10, when Peter heals the crippled beggar, he begins “walking, and leaping, and praising God.” Name a time you have praised God for a blessing in your own life. What was the blessing?
- “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognized them as companions of Jesus.” (4:13) God has a long history of using unexpected people to do God’s work. When have you seen God working through unexpected people?

When there are about five minutes left for conversation, ask the following question:

*What do you understand differently about the Church or the Holy Spirit because of this conversation?*

#### Wrap Up/Weekly Practice (5)

Remind the participants of the weekly practice for the upcoming week:

*Set apart a quiet time and place to pray each day. Set a timer for at least five minutes. Begin your prayer time by asking God to be with you. Reflect on this question: What is holding me back from loving God with my whole heart, and soul, and mind? Where is God calling me to be free? Ask God for help being who God made you to be. Thank God for the gift of your time together.*

This is also the time when the facilitator should remind participants of housekeeping details for the next session.

# Session Two: Sharing and Serving

## Acts 4:32-8:40

### Online Small Group Facilitator Guide

#### Set up:

- Sign in to your video conferencing platform 15 minutes before the session is slated to begin.  
Ensure that your camera and microphone are working properly.
- Have the Small Group Curriculum Session within easy reach: either printed, or on another screen.

#### What you need:

- Bible
- Solid Internet Connectivity

#### Gathering Prayer (5)

Greet participants and orient them to order of the session. Then ask for prayer requests.

Some facilitators will be comfortable extemporaneously praying for others. Some facilitators will not. If you do not feel comfortable, you can always pray this prayer:

*Holy Spirit, we give you thanks for our time together today. We especially give you thanks for \_\_\_\_\_ . We also bring before you the cares and concerns of our hearts, including \_\_\_\_\_ . We ask that you be with us, and that you open our hearts, souls and minds to your word and your love. We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.*

#### Check-In (10)

Invite participants to answer the following question:

*How did your prayer practice go the last week? What went well? What did you learn?*

Facilitators may wish to practice mutual invitation (see Small Group Facilitator Guide, above) or they may wish to simply call on individuals. Participants who pass should be invited to share after the other participants have shared.

#### Small Group Conversation (40)

Facilitators should be ready to very generally remind participants of what they read this week.

Acts 4:32-5:11	Believers Share their Possessions (Almost)
Acts 5:12-26	The Apostles Heal Many/First Jailbreak

Acts 5:27-42	The Apostles and Gamaliel
Acts 6:1-7	Seven Deacons
Acts 6:8-15	Stephen Arrested
Acts 7:1-8:4	Stephen's Witness
Acts 8:4-8:40	Philip in Samaria & the Wilderness Road

Open the small group conversation with the following question:

- *What surprised you in the reading this week?*

After the opening question has been discussed, choose any of the following questions to discuss with your small group. The facilitator should use their best judgment to select the questions that they believe will elicit meaningful conversation for your context. The small group may spend the entire time on one question, or do several. How many questions the group moves through is less important than fruitful conversation for the group.

- *The apostles pray for boldness in 4:29-31. Why do you believe they pray for boldness? Tell a story about a time you witnessed boldness in action.*
- *The Ananias and Sapphira story (5:1-11) is severe, uncompromising and uncomfortable, especially considering the lies that we tell ourselves about security. What are you holding back from God for the sake of your own feelings of security?*
- *The teacher Gamaliel advises that the leaders to “keep away from these men and let them alone; because if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them—in that case you may even be found fighting against God!” (5:38-39) Tell a story about a time that something worked when you didn’t think that it could, or would.*
- *As the church and its ministry grew, so did the need for new divisions of labor within the church. In 6:1-7, the apostles find those with the gifts of service to begin what we now know as the deaconate. We are all called by God to different work; what to what work are you called?*
- *Stephen draws attention to himself as a person who is full of grace and power. (6:8) Who are the people in our recent times who are full of grace and power, and because of their signs and wonders, are brought under attack?*
- *Simon the Magician tries to buy the Holy Spirit from Peter and John. (8:9-24) Peter tells him that “your heart is not right before God.” Where did Simon’s heart go wrong? Do we ever make the same mistakes?*
- *Philip obediently goes to the dangerous wilderness road and there finds someone entirely unexpected for many reasons, not least ethnicity and gender identity. How does God reach out to the unexpected among us today? Are we reaching those unlike us?*

When there are about five minutes left for conversation, ask the following question:

*What do you understand differently about the Church or the Holy Spirit because of this conversation?*

## Wrap Up/Weekly Practice (5)

Remind the participants of the weekly practice for the upcoming week:

*Set apart a quiet time and place to pray each day. Set a timer for at least five minutes. Begin your prayer time by asking God to be with you. Take time to pray for one person whom you know needs prayers. In your heart, lift them up to God. Be specific about how you want God to help them. Thank God for them.*

This is also the time when the facilitator should remind participants of housekeeping details for the next session.

# Session Three: Peter and Paul

## Acts 9:1-12:25

### Online Small Group Facilitator Guide

#### Set up:

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#### What you need:

- Bible
- Solid Internet Connectivity

#### Gathering Prayer (5)

Greet participants and orient them to order of the session. Then ask for prayer requests.

Some facilitators will be comfortable extemporaneously praying for others. Some facilitators will not. If you do not feel comfortable, you can always pray this prayer:

*Holy Spirit, we give you thanks for our time together today. We especially give you thanks for \_\_\_\_\_ . We also bring before you the cares and concerns of our hearts, including \_\_\_\_\_ . We ask that you be with us, and that you open our hearts, souls and minds to your word and your love. We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.*

#### Check-In (10)

Invite participants to answer the following question:

*How did your prayer practice go last week? What went well? What did you learn?*

Facilitators may wish to practice mutual invitation (see Small Group Facilitator Guide, above) or they may wish to simply call on individuals. Participants who pass should be invited to share after the other participants have shared.

#### Small Group Conversation (40)

Facilitators should be ready to very generally remind participants of what they read this week.

Acts 9:1-31	Saul's Conversion
Acts 9:32-43	Two Healings

Acts 10:1-16	Two Visions
Acts 10:17-48	Peter and Cornelius
Acts 11:1-18	Peter Reports to the Church at Jerusalem
Acts 11:19-30	Church in Antioch
Acts 12:1-25	Second Jailbreak, Death of Herod

Open the small group conversation with the following question:

- *What surprised you in the reading this week?*

After the opening question has been discussed, choose any of the following questions to discuss with your small group. The facilitator should use their best judgment to select the questions that they believe will elicit meaningful conversation for your context. The small group may spend the entire time on one question, or do several. How many questions the group moves through is less important than fruitful conversation for the group.

- *Ananias is ordered to go and lay hands on a known enemy of the church, and he has severe misgivings (9:13-14) but God orders him to go to Saul regardless. How do you think Ananias felt? Why did Ananias go, anyway? What would you have felt or done?*
- *Meanwhile the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up. Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers. (9:31) What does a church that has peace look like? What does the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit tangibly mean?*
- *God was working on Cornelius and Peter at the same time to bring them together for God's purposes. (10:1-33) Have you ever experienced a synchronicity that brought you and someone else together for God's purposes?*
- *In 10:45-47, Peter and the other circumcised believers are amazed that God's spirit was also poured out on the Gentiles. Peter orders them to be baptized, setting up a fight in the Jerusalem Church. (11:1-3) When has the church been uncertain as to who does and doesn't belong? Where does God call us in those times?*
- *Luke notes, "It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called 'Christians.'" (11:26) What does "Christian" mean to you today? What does it mean in the wider culture? Are these meanings similar or dissimilar?*
- *Rhoda is so surprised that Peter is knocking at the door she leaves him standing outside. (12:12-17) When have you been this surprised by something God has done?*

When there are about five minutes left for conversation, ask the following question:

*What do you understand differently about the Church or the Holy Spirit because of this conversation?*

#### Wrap Up/Weekly Practice (5)

Remind the participants of the weekly practice for the next week.

# Session Four: The Word of the Lord Spread

## Acts 13:1-16:15

### Online Small Group Facilitator Guide

#### Set up:

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- Have the Small Group Curriculum Session within easy reach: either printed, or on another screen.

#### What you need:

- Bible
- Solid Internet Connectivity

#### Gathering Prayer (5)

Greet participants and orient them to order of the session. Then ask for prayer requests.

Some facilitators will be comfortable extemporaneously praying for others. Some facilitators will not. If you do not feel comfortable, you can always pray this prayer:

*Holy Spirit, we give you thanks for our time together today. We especially give you thanks for \_\_\_\_\_ . We also bring before you the cares and concerns of our hearts, including \_\_\_\_\_. We ask that you be with us, and that you open our hearts, souls and minds to your word and your love. We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.*

#### Check-In (10)

Invite participants to answer the following question:

*How did your prayer practice go last week? What went well? What did you learn?*

Facilitators may wish to practice mutual invitation (see Small Group Facilitator Guide, above) or they may wish to simply call on individuals. Participants who pass should be invited to share after the other participants have shared.

#### Small Group Conversation (40)

Facilitators should be ready to very generally remind participants of what they read this week.

Acts 13:1-12	Saul and Barnabas Sent
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Acts 13:13-52	Paul and Barnabas in Pisidia
Acts 14:1-28	Paul is Stoned (but Survives)
Acts 15:1-21	Jerusalem Council
Acts 15:22-35	Council's Letter to Believers
Acts 15:36-41	Paul and Barnabas Part
Acts 16:1-15	Timothy, Macedonia, and Lydia

Open the small group conversation with the following question:

- *What surprised you in the reading this week?*

After the opening question has been discussed, choose any of the following questions to discuss with your small group. The facilitator should use their best judgment to select the questions that they believe will elicit meaningful conversation for your context. The small group may spend the entire time on one question, or do several. How many questions the group moves through is less important than fruitful conversation for the group.

- *While fasting and worshiping, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” (13:2) What can this story teach us about community discernment? When has the community identified gifts for ministry in yourself or others?*
- *Paul and Barnabas have significant problems in Pisidia, Iconium and Lystra, to the point of Paul being stoned by the crowds. At the same time, they gained new disciples and were also filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. (13:52) How are both possible at the same time?*
- *In Lystra, after Paul heals a beggar, the crowds try to offer sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas, believing that they are gods. But they respond, “We are mortals just like you!” (14:15) Sometimes we forget that the people in our bible were humans like us. How does reminding ourselves of their humanity help us read Scripture?*
- *In 14:22, Paul and Barnabas “strengthened the souls of the disciples and encouraged them to continue in the faith, saying, ‘It is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God.’” How do persecutions make the church stronger?*
- *The Council in Jerusalem was a turning point in the early church. Decisions were made as a group, taking into careful consideration the new revelation of Jesus, the experiences of Paul and Barnabas, as well as Scripture and tradition. What can our church learn from this experience of the early church?*
- *The Lord opened Lydia’s heart to hear what Paul had to say. (16:14) Describe a time when the Lord opened your heart to hear what another had to say about God.*

When there are about five minutes left for conversation, ask the following question:

*What do you understand differently about the Church or the Holy Spirit because of this conversation?*

## Wrap Up/Weekly Practice (5)

Remind the participants of the weekly practice.

*Set apart a quiet time and place to pray each day. Using a journal, reflect on a time when God was present to you. Name this event, and give thanks for that event. Reflect on the way that it shaped your life. When you are done journaling, give thanks to God for the time you spent together, and ask God to be present with you throughout your day.*

This is also the time when the facilitator should remind participants of housekeeping details for the next session.

# Session Five: Turning the World Upside Down

## Acts 16:16 - 23:11

### Online Small Group Facilitator Guide

#### Set up:

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#### What you need:

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*Holy Spirit, we give you thanks for our time together today. We especially give you thanks for \_\_\_\_\_ . We also bring before you the cares and concerns of our hearts, including \_\_\_\_\_. We ask that you be with us, and that you open our hearts, souls and minds to your word and your love. We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.*

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#### Small Group Conversation (40)

Facilitators should be ready to very generally remind participants of what they read this week.

Acts 16:16-40	The Non-Jailbreak
Acts 17:1-34	Thessalonica, Beroea, Athens
Acts 18:1-28	Gentile Ministry
Acts 19:1-20:16	Trouble in Ephesus; Paul's Continued Journey
Acts 20:17-38	Paul says Goodbye to the Ephesian Church
Acts 21:1-26	A prophecy; Paul goes to Jerusalem
Acts 21:27-22:29	Paul Arrested

Open the small group conversation with the following question:

- *What surprised you in the reading this week?*

After the opening question has been discussed, choose any of the following questions to discuss with your small group. The facilitator should use their best judgment to select the questions that they believe will elicit meaningful conversation for your context. The small group may spend the entire time on one question, or do several. How many questions the group moves through is less important than fruitful conversation for the group.

- *The story about the possessed slave girl and Paul and Silas being thrown in prison (16:16-40) has the theme of freedom. Who is free in this story? Who is enslaved? What does it mean to be free?*
- *In Thessalonica and Beroea, Paul and Silas cause uprisings and riots. (17:1-15) Why do you think that is? What is so threatening that Paul and Silas are chased down in Beroea as well?*
- *While Paul waits for Silas and his other companions in Athens, Paul is deeply distressed by the many idols in the city. (17:16-33) While Athens has overt idols, our own contexts have covert idols. What are some of the idols that lead us away from God?*
- *The riot in Ephesus was started because of economic concerns; (19:23-27) Christians were disrupting the status quo and local industry. How are Christians called to put their money where their faith is today?*
- *Throughout Acts, the story of God's people has been recounted. Now as Paul is placed under arrest in Jerusalem, Paul adds his own story to these stories. (22:1-21) How might you imagine your own story as part of God's larger story?*

When there are about five minutes left for conversation, ask the following question:

*What do you understand differently about the Church or the Holy Spirit because of this conversation?*

#### Wrap Up/Weekly Practice (5)

Remind the participants of the weekly practice for the upcoming week:

*Set apart a quiet time and place to pray each day. Set a timer for at least five minutes. Ask God to be present with you. Spend time reflecting on this question: How is God calling me to bring Good News to*

*others? With whom is God calling me to be in conversation? How is God equipping me to love others?  
Thank God for the gift of your time together.*

This is also the time when the facilitator should remind participants of housekeeping details for the next session.

# Session Six: Bearing Witness in Rome

## Acts 23:12 - 28:44

### Online Small Group Facilitator Guide

#### Set up:

- Sign in to your video conferencing platform 15 minutes before the session is slated to begin. Ensure that your camera and microphone are working properly.
- Have the Small Group Curriculum Session within easy reach: either printed, or on another screen.

#### What you need:

- Bible
- Solid Internet Connectivity
- If the group can meet in person to celebrate Pentecost, a plan for a celebration.

#### Gathering Prayer (5)

Greet participants and orient them to order of the session. Then ask for prayer requests.

Some facilitators will be comfortable extemporaneously praying for others. Some facilitators will not. If you do not feel comfortable, you can always pray this prayer:

*Holy Spirit, we give you thanks for our time together today. We especially give you thanks for \_\_\_\_\_ . We also bring before you the cares and concerns of our hearts, including \_\_\_\_\_ . We ask that you be with us, and that you open our hearts, souls and minds to your word and your love. We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.*

#### Check-In (10)

Invite participants to answer the following question:

*How did your prayer practice go last week? What went well? What did you learn?*

Facilitators may wish to practice mutual invitation (see Small Group Facilitator Guide, above) or they may wish to simply call on individuals. Participants who pass should be invited to share after the other participants have shared.

#### Small Group Conversation (40)

Facilitators should be ready to very generally remind participants of what they read this week.

Acts 23:12-35	Plot to Kill Paul
Acts 24:1-27	Paul before the Governor
Acts 25:1-22	Paul appeals to the Emperor
Acts 25:23-26:32	Paul before the King
Acts 27:1-12	Paul Sails for Rome
Acts 27:13-28:44	Shipwreck -- Paul Reaches Rome

Open the small group conversation with the following question:

- *What surprised you in the reading this week?*

After the opening question has been discussed, choose any of the following questions to discuss with your small group. The facilitator should use their best judgment to select the questions that they believe will elicit meaningful conversation for your context. The small group may spend the entire time on one question, or do several. How many questions the group moves through is less important than fruitful conversation for the group.

- *"That night the Lord stood near him and said, "Keep up your courage! For just as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also in Rome." (23:11) When have you been encouraged in a bleak situation?*
- *Paul retells his conversion story in Acts 26. One particular line does not occur in the other narratives: When Jesus is talking to Paul, Jesus says, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It hurts you to kick against the goads." (26:14) A goad is a type of cattle prod. Have you ever kicked against God's goad in your own life? What happened?*
- *In addition to the stonings, persecutions, arrests, and other sundry events in the life of Paul, Paul is shipwrecked (27:1-44). Could Paul have imagined such a life when he was initially called by Jesus on the road to Damascus? What surprises have been in store for you in your own life of faith?*
- *The book of Acts ends somewhat abruptly, without finishing Paul's narrative. Why do you think this is so?*

When there are about ten minutes left for conversation, ask the following question:

*Now that we've read the entire book of Acts together, how has your understanding of the Holy Spirit and the Church shifted?*

Celebration!

Thank participants for their participation in this small group; whether or not the group can gather in person, it would be appropriate to mark the occasion with a celebration.

# Acts in Easter Reading Plan

Liturgical Date	2020 Calendar Date	Reading	Summary
			A Violent Wind
Easter 2	4/19/2020	Acts 1:1-1:26	Prologue, Ascension, Matthias Chosen
	4/20/2020	Acts 2:1-13	Coming of the Holy Spirit
	4/21/2020	Acts 2:14-36	Peter Addresses Crowd
	4/22/2020	Acts 2:37-47	First 3,000 Converts, Common Life Among Believers
	4/23/2020	Acts 3:1-26	Peter Heals a Beggar and Preaches
	4/24/2020	Acts 4:1-22	Peter and John Before the Council
	4/25/2020	Acts 4:23-31	The Believers Pray for Boldness
			Sharing and Serving
Easter 3	4/26/2020	Acts 4:32-5:11	Believers Share their Possessions (Almost)
	4/27/2020	Acts 5:12-26	The Apostles Heal Many/First Jailbreak
	4/28/2020	Acts 5:27-42	The Apostles and Gamaliel
	4/29/2020	Acts 6:1-7	Seven Deacons
	4/30/2020	Acts 6:8-15	Stephen Arrested
	5/1/2020	Acts 7:1-8:4	Stephen's Witness
	5/2/2020	Acts 8:4-8:40	Philip in Samaria & the Wilderness Road
			Peter and Paul
Easter 4	5/3/2020	Acts 9:1-31	Saul's Conversion
	5/4/2020	Acts 9:32-43	Two Healings
	5/5/2020	Acts 10:1-16	Two Visions
	5/6/2020	Acts 10:17-48	Peter and Cornelius
	5/7/2020	Acts 11:1-18	Peter Reports to the Church at Jerusalem
	5/8/2020	Acts 11:19-30	Church in Antioch

	5/9/2020	Acts 12:1-25	Second Jailbreak, Death of Herod
			The Word of the Lord Spread
Easter 5	5/10/2020	Acts 13:1-12	Saul and Barnabas Sent
	5/11/2020	Acts 13:13-52	Paul and Barnabas in Pisidia
	5/12/2020	Acts 14:1-28	Paul is Stoned (but Survives)
	5/13/2020	Acts 15:1-21	Jerusalem Council
	5/14/2020	Acts 15:22-35	Council's Letter to Believers
	5/15/2020	Acts 15:36-41	Paul and Barnabas Part
	5/16/2020	Acts 16:1-15	Timothy, Macedonia, and Lydia
			Turning the World Upside Down
Easter 6	5/17/2020	Acts 16:16-40	The Non-Jailbreak
	5/18/2020	Acts 17:1-34	Thessalonica, Beroea, Athens
	5/19/2020	Acts 18:1-28	Gentile Ministry
	5/20/2020	Acts 19:1-20:16	Trouble in Ephesus; Paul's Continued Journey
	5/21/2020	Acts 20:17-38	Paul says Goodbye to the Ephesian Church
	5/22/2020	Acts 21:1-26	A prophecy; Paul goes to Jerusalem
	5/23/2020	Acts 21:27-22:29	Paul Arrested
			Bearing Witness in Rome
Easter 7	5/24/2020	Acts 22:30-23:11	Paul Before the Council
	5/25/2020	Acts 23:12-35	Plot to Kill Paul
	5/26/2020	Acts 24:1-27	Paul before the Governor
	5/27/2020	Acts 25:1-22	Paul appeals to the Emperor
	5/28/2020	Acts 25:23-26:32	Paul before the King
	5/29/2020	Acts 27:1-12	Paul Sails for Rome
	5/30/2020	Acts 27:13-28:44	Shipwreck; Paul Reaches Rome

# Acts in Easter

## Prayer Practices

### Session One: A Violent Wind

Acts 1:1-4:31

Set apart a quiet time and place to pray each day. Set a timer for at least five minutes. Ask God to be with you while you pray. As you inhale, pray, “Spirit of the Living God,” and as you exhale, pray, “Fall afresh on me.” Allow yourself to sink into the prayer; if you are distracted, acknowledge the distraction and just start praying again. At the end of your time, talk to God about how that went. Give thanks for your time together, and say, “Amen.”

### Session Two: Sharing and Serving

Acts 4:32-8:40

Set apart a quiet time and place to pray each day. Set a timer for at least five minutes. Begin your prayer time by asking God to be with you. Reflect on this question: What is holding me back from loving God with my whole heart, and soul, and mind? Where is God calling me to be free? Ask God for help being who God made you to be. Thank God for the gift of your time together.

### Session Three: Peter and Paul

Acts 9:1-12:25

Set apart a quiet time and place to pray each day. Set a timer for at least five minutes. Begin your prayer time by asking God to be with you. Take time to pray for one person whom you know needs prayers. In your heart, lift them up to God. Be specific about how you want God to help them. Thank God for them.

### Session Four: The Word of the Lord Spread

Acts 13:1-16:15

Set apart a quiet time and place to pray each day. Set a timer for at least five minutes. Settle into a comfortable position, and ask God to be with you. Take three big breaths in and out, and then listen in silence to God. If you are distracted, focus on your breathing until you can quiet yourself again, and continue listening. At the end of your time, slowly pray the Lord’s Prayer.

### Session Five: Turning the World Upside Down

Acts 16:16 - 23:11

Set apart a quiet time and place to pray each day. Using a journal, reflect on a time when God was present to you. Name this event, and give thanks for that event. Reflect on the way that it shaped your life. When you are done journaling, give thanks to God for the time you spent together, and ask God to be present with you throughout your day.

**Session Six: Bearing Witness in Rome**

**Acts 23:12 - 28:44**

Set apart a quiet time and place to pray each day. Set a timer for at least five minutes. Ask God to be present with you. Spend time reflecting on this question: How is God calling me to bring Good News to others? With whom is God calling me to be in conversation? How is God equipping me to love others? Thank God for the gift of your time together.