st james in the city

Using these Bible Studies

The studies are broken down into different sections that each focus on one of St James in the City's values. We think this is a helpful way to have time together that focuses on many different areas of our lives as Christians, and not simply in getting more 'head knowledge' about God.

Live:
The foundation for spiritual growth is an intimate connection with God and His family. The questions in the section will help you get to know the members of your group and help grow that sense of family which we are called into.

Grow:
In this section, the questions are designed to bring you to a deeper understanding of the Bible and to help you consider how the truths of the Bible can impact your life.

Serve:
Nothing is more fulfilling than using your God-given gifts to serve and help meet the needs of others in God's family. This section will help make that desire a reality. You will be encouraged and challenged to take steps to serve those inside and outside of the group.

Build:
The thought of sharing our faith can be scary and can feel awkward. Don't worry: this is a common feeling! However, God wants to use you to reach those around you for Christ. This section is designed to give you and your group practical, manageable steps for sharing Christ that can become a part of your everyday life.

Love:
You were made for God's pleasure. Even when we gather as a smaller group, it is great to have the opportunity to worship and to surrender your heart to God. This could come in a variety of forms such as prayer, singing, or simply sharing what God is doing in your lives. Contribute as much or as little as you feel able to.

Build – Church on Fire

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Introduction

Jesus clearly commands us to go out on mission (Matthew 28:16-20): “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you”.

These studies pick up from where Matthew leaves off and takes us through the first few chapters of Acts to see what the church was doing. We know these passages well but there is still so much for us to talk about and learn together.

Acts is a book of amazing scope: the Church goes from being a tiny sect in a corner of Jerusalem to the very centre of the Empire in Rome, taking in most of the Eastern Mediterranean on the way. It is also a book of amazing scope in its theological breadth and themes:

- Ascension and return of Christ.
- Person and work of the Holy Spirit.
- Church: its Life and its Ministry.
- World mission and evangelisation.
- Cross-cultural issues.
- Early Gospel Message.

All of this is wrapped up in an amazing adventure story involving danger, violent death, persecution, political in-fighting, imprisonment, escape and shipwreck,

Acts is Volume 2 of Luke-Acts. Its author does not sign his name to the work, but he writes himself into the narrative at points. The two volume work has been attributed to Paul’s physician, Luke, since the earliest Christian documents.
Luke tells us of his methods in the first few verses of this book: he is a careful researcher. We learn from Acts that he had sufficient opportunity to carry out this research, not only from mixing with the very mobile, early believer in their travels around the ancient world, but also from this two year stay in the Holy Land during Paul’s imprisonment at Caesarea, when Luke was with him but free to travel about (Acts 21-26).
The book appears incomplete – Paul is still under house arrest awaiting trial in Rome and enjoying many privileges (Acts 28). We don’t know if Paul was released, and able to minister freely for another couple of years before his final martyrdom in Rome, which seems the most likely hypothesis. But Acts does leave Paul still alive and well, which would argue for a date in the first half of the 60’s A.D.

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Study 1: The Spirit is promised

Live

Can you remember a time when you had the greatest surprise or shock?

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship. Thank God that Jesus is at his right hand, interceding for us constantly.

Grow

Read Acts 1:1-11 together.

- What does this passage tell us about:
  - God?
  - Humanity?
  - The church/God's people specifically?
- Make a list of all the evidence in these verses that point to the fact that Jesus' resurrection was physical and not just spiritual.
- What was the reason for meeting together and praying (1:4)?
  - Bearing in mind that nothing happened for 10 days from ascension to Pentecost, what effect might this period have had on the disciples?
  - Has this got anything to teach us about waiting for God to act?
- Jesus had been with his disciples for 40 days since the resurrection, and although he had developed a habit of coming and going rather suddenly, they had got used to him being around. What did they expect to happen now? (see 1:6 and Luke 24:21).
- Imagine if you were with the disciples when Jesus ascended (1:9). How would it have felt?
- What promise did the two angels give when Jesus ascended (1:10-11)?
  - How should this affect our lives?

Thinking about our own lives…

- Have you ever seen or heard Jesus really clearly? What was it like?
- What difference does it make to your day-to-day life that Jesus is going to return one day?

Build

Think of your group as the disciples, chosen by Jesus, waiting to receive his power and to change the world (or Liverpool at least!).
What does v. 8 call us to be? What would that look like in our lives?
How does the promise of the Holy Spirit help us in our evangelism?

Prayer

Close in prayer. Commit to praying by name for five non-Christians that you know through the rest of this study series. Share the names with each other and hold each other accountable: don't just pray during the Connect group but through the week as well.

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Study 2: The Spirit descends

Live
Can you remember the occasion when you were most afraid?

Love
Start your time together in prayer and worship. Thank God for the gift of his Spirit.

Grow
Read Acts 2:1-13 together.

- What does this passage tell us about:
  - God?
  - Humanity?
  - The church/God's people specifically?
- Jesus had promised the disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit to them. From what he had already told them, who and what should they have been expecting? (See John 14:15-18 and Acts 1:8 for starters).
- What three signs did the disciples receive of the coming of the Holy Spirit (2:2-4)?
  - What do you think was/is their significance?
- What did the disciples do after they received the Holy Spirit (2:11-14)?
- The disciples had to wait 10 days after Jesus' departure before the Holy Spirit came. Do we have to wait? (See Acts 2:38, Romans 8:9-11 and 1 Corinthians 12:3).
- Notice the two reactions of the crowd (2:12-13). What would our reaction have been?
  - What is our reaction to those who may have "spiritual experiences" today?

Thinking about our own lives…

- When was the last time you felt filled by the Spirit? What happened?
- What difference does the Spirit make to your day-to-day life?

Build
How can the Holy Spirit help us in reaching those that we feel we cannot speak with?

What does this passage make you think about reaching other nations and telling them the Gospel?

Do you feel called to overseas mission?

Prayer
Pray for your five friends and for courage and confidence for yourself as you speak to them.
Let's also pray for missionaries from St James around the world: Chris and Liz in Spain, Jarod and Bexi in Croatia, Bryan and Cherry in China, James Harding and family teaching Church leaders in Kuala Lumpur.

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Study 3: Peter's sermon

Live
If you could go anywhere on holiday, where would it be and why?

Love
Read Psalm 100 aloud. Be quiet for a couple of minutes. Ask people to share in twos what lines meant the most to them.

Grow
Read Acts 2:14-41 together.

- What does this passage tell us about:
  - God?
  - Humanity?
  - The church/God's people specifically?
- What were the main points in Peter's sermon? Try to summarise it by each picking out a few key verses (3 maximum).
- Peter refers to all three members of the Trinity in his sermon. What does the passage tell us about the roles of:
  - the Father.
  - the Son.
  - the Holy Spirit.
- Look at the way Peter preached. What can we learn from his style and content of preaching that might help to make our own witnessing more effective?
- This particular sermon was very effective (2:41). What do you think contributed to this?
- What did Peter demand of those who wanted to respond?
  - What was promised in return? Notice especially the two elements of the promise of salvation (2:37-39).

Thinking about our own lives…

- When was the last time you shared your faith and proclaimed the Gospel? How did it go?
- Would you be confident in sharing your faith with the same boldness as Peter? What makes it hard or scary?

Build
What does it mean to be a witness (2:32)? How can you be a more effective witness?

Practise 'matchstick testimonies' – can you share the Gospel whilst holding a lit match before it burns your fingers? You can also practise sharing your own testimony in a short time (what God has done in your life since you came to know him fully).

Prayer
Pray for your five friends and that you would be an effective witness to them.

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Study 4: Incredible Growth

Live
What present gave you the most pleasure to give?

Love
Start your time together in prayer and worship. Use a song to help you worship God.

Grow
Read Acts 2:42-47 together.

- What does this passage tell us about:
  - God?
  - Humanity?
  - The church/God's people specifically?
- The believer's lifestyle was based on "spiritual activities" (2:42). What were these and why do you think they are the ones that are mentioned?
- 2:44-47 gives a description of the apostle's lifestyle. Identify what these are.
  - Which do you think are the most important?
  - If you were describing our Christian lifestyle in Liverpool, how would it differ?
- Is the lifestyle described one that we should aim for today?
  - Is it practical?
  - Is there a place for Christian communities? If so, what place?
- How much is the Church lifestyle a responsibility of the Church as a whole and that of the individual?
- What was the result in the Church (2:43,47)? Was this the result of lifestyle and/or of something else?

Thinking about our own lives…

- What elements of the early church do you see in your own life?
- What do you see in 2:42-47 that you want to grow in? Ask God for help to work out one thing you could change this week to make it possible.
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Build
In Jerusalem the church was experiencing phenomenal growth. Luke carefully records the statistics for us. The increase in numbers is seen in 2:47 but let's look at the numbers in more detail.

- Acts 1:15 – When Jesus left them, the Jerusalem fellowship numbered about 120 people in all.
- Acts 2:41,47 – On the Day of Pentecost itself, a further 3000 were added; although many of these were pilgrims from elsewhere in the Empire, visiting for the Feast, we read in 2:47 that the Lord added daily to their number. Daily must mean a minimum growth rate of 365 per year. Most churches in Britain would settle for that today!

Build – Church on Fire

- Acts 4:4 – Within months or a year or so, the numbers of the Jerusalem Church had grown to 5000 men. This would suggest at least 10,000 in all, including women and children (very probably more likely 15,000).
- Acts 5:14,28 – More and more men and women believed and joined the church, despite rising persecution, so that (5:28) the apostles could fairly be accused of "filling Jerusalem with their teaching".
- Acts 6:1,7 – Luke no longer speaks of addition but of multiplication – we read that the growth was "rapid" and that the word of God "spread" (v. 28).
- Acts 21:20 – By the time Paul and his group visited Jerusalem in about 55 A.D., i.e. 25 years after the Day of Pentecost, we find that the church in Jerusalem was now measured in "many thousands". The word is literally "myriads", meaning "tens of thousands". This indicates a minimum membership of 20,000, but suggests much more! The best estimate of the population of Jerusalem and its surrounding districts is 200,000. From almost nothing, the church had grown to a very visible and significant minority in the city of Jerusalem where Jesus had planted them 25 years earlier.

Imagine if we saw such numbers at St James' and in Liverpool! Think about how we reach the community around us at St James' and how we could improve our outreach. Share ideas with each other and then pass them to the staff team.

Prayer

Close in prayer. Pray for your five friends, but also pray for something bigger. Pray that we would see a revival in Liverpool like that of Jerusalem. Pray that we can reach into the community around us and bring people to know God.

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Study 5: A wonderful healing

Live

If they decided to spend millions on making an epic film about an Old Testament character, which one would you most like it to be and why?

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship. Thank God that he heals us and makes us whole.

Grow

Read Acts 3:1-21

- What does this passage tell us about:
  - God?
  - Humanity?
  - The church/God's people specifically?
- The crippled man used to sit on the way to the temple because he regarded it as a good place to get help. Consider the sort of help he would have got; ranging from being abused through to being ignored or given coppers to getting more than he was bargaining for. What sort of help would he get if he were sat outside of St James'?
- Although this man was healed there must have been others who were not, so why was this man healed? As well as looking at his response, look at why Jesus did miracles (see, for example, John 20:30-31).
- What was the reaction of the crowd to the healing and how did Peter make use of it?
  - What does this tell us about the purpose of miracles?
- Peter challenged religious people (they were all going into the temple to pray). Why were they surprised?
  - Would it surprise us?
- Why were Peter and John able to perform this miracle? (See, for example, Acts 1:8, Luke 10:17, 1 Corinthians 12:7-11.)
- Should we expect miracles to happen today? In our church? Through us?

Thinking about our own lives…

- Have you seen a miracle of healing? Would you like to see one? Why/why not?

For further thought/background…

Throughout the Book of Acts, we see the Holy Spirit leading the way to fulfil what Jesus has said and done, and we see the power that Jesus spoke of in action.

- The Spirit came upon the first 120 believers at Pentecost (2:4) and filling all the church with power, courage and boldness to preach the Gospel (3:8, 4:31) – not only to preach it but to demonstrate it as lives were changed people were set free and diseases were healed.
- Outstanding examples of miraculous healings took place, not only at the hands of Apostles (e.g. 3:6) but also others like Stephen (6:8), Philip (8:6) and Ananias (9:17), who were not Apostles.
- Intercessory prayer saw amazing results, not only in the growth of the church, but also in the release of prisoners (12:5,12).

- Power encounters with those wielding demonic powers were not unusual (8:10, 13:6-12, 16:16-18).
- In both Peter's ministry, even his shadow unleashed divine healing (5:15). In Paul's ministry, aprons and handkerchiefs he had touched were taken to the sick and demonised, and they were healed and released (19:12).
- In 19:11, we read of Paul performing "extraordinary miracles"; presumably that meant there were "ordinary" miracles too!
- Dead people were raised – Dorcas (9:35-42) and possibly Eutychus (20:9-12).
- The Holy Spirit guides the church through visions (e.g. 9:10, 10:10, 16:9, 18:9-10), prophecies (e.g. 11:27, 13:2, 21:10-11), direct commands (8:29) and angelic visitations (8:26, 10:22, 12:7).

Reading the book of Acts is a dangerous occupation. It will challenge you as an individual and all of us as his church as we seek to reach our generation.

Serve

What is your response to people begging? Why do you do this?

Build

What miracles would we like to see happen – in our family, in our homes, in our relationships, in our work, in our community, in our world? Pray for these.

Prayer

Close in prayer: continue to pray for your five friends. Pray that we will trust in God and His power that He can produce miracles and that we will be expectant. Pray that we will see miracles in the lives of those around us and in this city.