

Eight Studies in Acts of the Apostles

Dangerous Faith by Open Doors <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/resources/dangerous-faith/>

Series for Summer 2021

Session	Sunday	Title	Reading from Acts
1	18.4.21	'And his door was always open'	Acts 28:23–31
2	25.4.21	'And a cloud hid Him from their sight'	Acts 1:1–11
3	2.5.21	'God's temple is not built with human hands'	Acts 6:8–15; 7:44–8:1
4	9.5.21	'It takes a smashing'	Acts 8:1–8; 12–13
5	16.5.21	'The believers lowered him in a basket'	Acts 9:1–25
6	23.5.21	'They were called Christian'	Acts 11:19–26
7	6.6.21	'They were tentmakers'	Acts 18:1–17
8	13.6.21	'In every city lies persecution'	Acts 20:17–38; 21:7-14

Session	Sunday	Title	Reading from Acts
1	18.4.21	'And his door was always open'	Acts 28:23–31

QUESTIONS from St Peter's

- Why was Paul in Rome?
- Who were the first people Paul met in Rome under house arrest?
- What was the duration of Paul's house arrest in Rome?

EXPLORE with Open Doors

- Have you ever felt as though you were drifting? Have you ever wondered: has God still got the same use for me?
- Verse 31 talks of Paul 'proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness...' If you had knocked on Paul's door and sat down with him, what kinds of things do you think he would have told you about Jesus and His kingdom?
- "It's not about us; it's about what the Holy Spirit does through us." In the video, Ron calls this 'a comforting truth'. Do you find comfort in it? If so, why?
- Where has the Holy Spirit placed you right now? Do you feel trapped? Do you feel as if you're not doing what you were born to do? Where you are for God is just as important as what you do for God. How might the Holy Spirit be getting the gospel out through you, right where you are?

Session	Sunday	Title	Reading from Acts
2	25.4.21	'And a cloud hid Him from their sight'	Acts 1:1–11

QUESTIONS from St Peter's

- In Acts 1:1, who is the author of Acts, what is the 'former book' and who was Theophilus?
- How does this passage compare with Luke 24:49-53?
- Why were the disciples baptised in the Holy Spirit only after Jesus had ascended?
- In Acts 1:11, what is the hope that this verse brings for the future?

EXPLORE with Open Doors

- Victimised, beaten, abused and alone, Mabel* cried out: "Lord, why must You be so invisible?" Have you ever felt abandoned by God?
- In Acts 1:3 it says that Jesus presented Himself alive to the apostles 'by many convincing proofs'. Can you list some of the Resurrection appearances? How did they prove Jesus had returned from the dead?
- In the video, Ron says that Jesus ascends to give us the space to do His work in our way, and so even our failures, our doubts, our struggles, become the means of God taking His power through us to all around us. How do you think our failures, doubts and struggles show God's power?
- Mabel* wanted the Lord to appear in a physical form, but He never did. She believed that it was not desertion, but generosity: "Because it seemed like he disappeared, He was really giving me the space to do the impossible... through His power to endure." How do you respond to that? Are you in a place where the Lord is giving you the space to do something which seems impossible?

*Watch the Open Doors Dangerous Faith video for session 2.

Session	Sunday	Title	Reading from Acts
3	2.5.21	'God's temple is not built with human hands'	Acts 6:8–15; 7:44–8:1

QUESTIONS from St Peter's

- Who was Stephen?

EXPLORE with Open Doors

- How do we 'build a temple with our own hands'?
- Imagine that you are an orthodox, pious worshipper who is visiting the Temple; you hear what Stephen says and see what happens to him. How do you respond? Are you angry? Upset? Confused?
- Read Acts 6:13–14. What exactly is Stephen being accused of?
- Stephen's speech lists many places outside the Temple – and, indeed, Israel – where people encountered God in a powerful way. Have you ever encountered God in an unusual, or even an 'impure' place?
- What are the ways in which we seek to keep God under control? Is it through tradition? A building? A doctrine?

Session	Sunday	Title	Reading from Acts
4	9.5.21	'It takes a smashing'	Acts 8:1–8; 12–13

QUESTIONS from St Peter's

- Who was Philip?

EXPLORE with Open Doors

- What would go through Philip's mind as he fled Jerusalem? How would he feel?
- 'Now those who were scattered went from place to place, proclaiming the word.' (Acts 8:4). Why were these fleeing followers willing to share the gospel that had got them into so much trouble in Jerusalem? (See Acts 1:8; 2:32, 4:19-20)
- In the video, Ron claims that persecution does two things: it pushes power down to people who have never had it before, and pushes people outward to places they have never been before. Why do you think this is? Have you seen this happen?
- Have you experienced a time of loss or smashing? Could you see God at work in that?

Session	Sunday	Title	Reading from Acts
5	16.5.21	'The believers lowered him in a basket'	Acts 9:1–25

QUESTIONS from St Peter's

- Who was Paul?

EXPLORE with Open Doors

- Put yourself in the place of Paul, being lowered in the basket. How do you think he felt?
- Read Acts 9:3-6. What is Jesus' accusation against Paul? Why does Jesus say, 'You are persecuting me', when Paul is attacking His followers?
- "In the persecuted church, Christians realise they are in trouble, and go to God about it. In the Western church, Christians forget they are in trouble, or in a fight, and even if they do remember, never manage to find the time to go to God about it." Do you agree?
- Remember, Jesus said "love your enemies". He didn't say, "don't make any". Does your faith make enemies?

Session	Sunday	Title	Reading from Acts
6	23.5.21	'They were called Christian'	Acts 11:19–26

QUESTIONS from St Peter's

- Where was Antioch and what was special about it?

EXPLORE with Open Doors

- Imagine you are a citizen of Antioch who hears about this new group of Jesus followers. Or that you are a fellow school pupil of Alexamenos in Rome. Why might you choose to mock these 'Christians'?
- Describe Barnabas' relationship with Paul. (Check out Acts 4:36; 9:26–28; 15:36–41; Galatians 2:11–14.) Why do you think Barnabas recruited Saul? What qualities might Saul have had that would have helped with this young church?
- We should expect to be mocked and looked down on. That's what people do when their worldview is threatened. Have you been mocked for your beliefs? How did you feel? And how did you respond?
- In the video, Nick says that we can give people the tools to defend themselves against abuse and persecution. What kind of tools would be useful and appropriate?

Session	Sunday	Title	Reading from Acts
7	6.6.21	'They were tentmakers'	Acts 18:1–17

QUESTIONS from St Peter's

- On all his travels, Paul supported himself financially as a tentmaker. What were the occupations of some other members of the early church?

EXPLORE with Open Doors

- In the video, Nick describes an early church meeting in the shop of Priscilla and Aquila. When did they meet? What did they do? What do we have in our services that they didn't? How might you replicate an early church meeting like that today?
- Read Acts 18:9-10, where Paul has a vision from the Lord. Can you think of other times when Paul has had a message in this way? Or other people in Acts?
- "Jesus was always calling people to movement, because it is only when you move out of your comfort zone that you find out how strong your faith really is." Have you experienced this? Is Jesus calling you out of your comfort zone right now?
- The early church carried their Scripture in their heads and their hearts. Is memorising Scripture part of your Christian practice? Are there significant passages that you could learn as individuals or groups? Or are there other ways to remember the truths of Scripture?

Session	Sunday	Title	Reading from Acts
8	13.6.21	'In every city lies persecution'	Acts 20:17–38; 21:7-14

QUESTIONS from St Peter's

- In Acts 20:34 Paul says that 'these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions'. How did Paul do this?
- In Acts 21:8 it says that Paul stayed with Philip the Evangelist, one of the Seven. What would have been Philip's first language?
- Consult a map of Paul's 3rd journey and find the locations mentioned in these readings. Why does Paul never seem to stay in the same place for very long? Have you stayed in the same place for a long time recently? Would you ever consider moving for the sake of the Gospel? Is there somewhere you have previously been but to which you would not consider returning because of danger or a bad experience?

EXPLORE with Open Doors

- Imagine you are among that group advising Paul about his next move. What arguments would you use to persuade him not to go up to Jerusalem?
- In these passages there are repeated images of being bound, imprisoned or captured. But in Acts 20:22-23, Paul describes himself as a 'captive to the Spirit'. What do you think this means?
- Paul's friends were able to pray, in the face of all the warnings and anxieties: "The Lord's will be done." Has there been a time in your life when you had to pray that prayer? Perhaps you are facing a similar time, now?
- "In the Christian life, the only defeat is disobedience." Are there areas in your life where you want to claim Christ's victory? How are you being called to follow Christ instead of your own desires?

Leader's Guide to Answering the Questions

Session	Sunday	Title	Reading from Acts
1	18.4.21	'And his door was always open'	Acts 28:23–31

QUESTIONS from St Peter's

- Why was Paul in Rome?

Months earlier, Paul had been tried by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem for blasphemy, just like Jesus and Stephen. But, unlike Jesus and Stephen, Paul was a Roman citizen and had the right to be tried by Caesar in Rome. Paul therefore used his Roman citizenship to get away from his trial in Jerusalem. The exciting journey to Rome under Roman guard was by sea and is told in earlier chapters of the Acts of the Apostles.

- Who were the first people Paul met in Rome under house arrest?

In Acts 28:17 we are told that Paul arranges his first formal meeting in Rome with the Jewish leaders in Rome. As a former Pharisee and rabbi himself, Paul often preached in synagogues and sought out Jewish leaders first, in whichever place he visited. It didn't always go well.

- What was the duration of Paul's house arrest in Rome?

2 years. [Acts 28:30]

EXPLORE with Open Doors

- Have you ever felt as though you were drifting? Have you ever wondered: has God still got the same use for me?

- Verse 31 talks of Paul 'proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness...' If you had knocked on Paul's door and sat down with him, what kinds of things do you think he would have told you about Jesus and His kingdom?

Here is a selection on the theme of love:

- *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. [Romans 5:6-8]*
- *If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal... And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. [1 Corinthians 13]*
- *Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. [2 Corinthians 9:7]*
- *May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. [2 Corinthians 13:14]*
- *And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. [Ephesians 3:17-19]*
- "It's not about us; it's about what the Holy Spirit does through us." In the video, Ron calls this 'a comforting truth'. Do you find comfort in it? If so, why?
- Where has the Holy Spirit placed you right now? Do you feel trapped? Do you feel as if you're not doing what you were born to do? Where you are for God is just as important as what you do for God. How might the Holy Spirit be getting the gospel out through you, right where you are?

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QUESTIONS from St Peter's

- In Acts 1:1, who is the author of Acts, what is the 'former book' and who was Theophilus?
Luke is the author of two books: the Gospel according to Luke and its sequel, The Acts of the Apostles. Luke is thought to have been the only one of the four gospel authors who was a gentile, possibly converted by Paul in Antioch. In Col. 4:14 Paul calls Luke 'the beloved Physician'. Both of his books are addressed to Theophilus and it is not clear whether Theophilus was a real person or a symbolic name as in Greek the name can be translated as 'friend of God' [Theos = God; philos = friend].
- How does this passage compare with Luke 24:49-53?
Similarities: Both give an account of how Jesus appeared after his resurrection and his Ascension. Differences: Luke's Gospel tells us more about how Jesus appeared to his disciples while Acts gives more detail about the coming of the Holy Spirit and Jesus' second coming.
- Why were the disciples baptised in the Holy Spirit only after Jesus had ascended?
The disciples were enabled by Jesus to perform miracles such as when Jesus sent out the 72. [Luke 10:1] But they remained deeply dependent upon Jesus' earthly presence, such as when Peter tried to walk on water. [Matt 14:22-31] During his earthly ministry, Jesus needed to make his disciples depend upon him and to focus only on him. But when Jesus ascended into heaven, the apostles would have been bereft of earthly contact with the Saviour. So that is why the Holy Spirit came down on each apostle after Jesus ascended – so that they could still be connected to Jesus and still have access to his power as they continued to preach the Gospel and do miracles to expand his Kingdom on earth.
- In Acts 1:11, what is the hope that this verse brings for the future?
The appearance of the two angels after Jesus has ascended and been hidden by clouds is first of all to rebuke the apostles for standing and staring at the sky in apparent disbelief. The angels remind the apostles that what they have just witnessed is not a dream but reality. The angels then state that, just as they have seen Jesus go up to heaven, so he will come once more into the world, not as a tiny infant as he did the first time or as a ghost, but as we see him portrayed here: physically, crowned in glory and surrounded by the heavenly host, to judge the living and the dead on the Day of Judgement. [Matt 25:31-46]

EXPLORE with Open Doors

- Victimised, beaten, abused and alone, Mabel* cried out: "Lord, why must You be so invisible?" Have you ever felt abandoned by God?
- In Acts 1:3 it says that Jesus presented Himself alive to the apostles 'by many convincing proofs'. Can you list some of the Resurrection appearances? How did they prove Jesus had returned from the dead?
- In the video, Ron says that Jesus ascends to give us the space to do His work in our way, and so even our failures, our doubts, our struggles, become the means of God taking His power through us to all around us. How do you think our failures, doubts and struggles show God's power?
- Mabel* wanted the Lord to appear in a physical form, but He never did. She believed that it was not desertion, but generosity: "Because it seemed like he disappeared, He was really giving me the space to do the impossible... through His power to endure." How do you respond to that? Are you in a place where the Lord is giving you the space to do something which seems impossible?

Session	Sunday	Title	Reading from Acts
3	2.5.21	'God's temple is not built with human hands'	Acts 6:8–15; 7:44–8:1

QUESTIONS from St Peter's

- Who was Stephen?

Acts 6:1-6 explains that, in the very earliest days of the church, as it was expanding, it consisted of both Hebrew and Greek speaking Jews. Stephen, a Grecian Jew, was appointed by the apostles as one of the seven representatives to represent the Greek speaking Jews to ensure that there was a fair distribution of food to the widows and children of Grecian Jews. Stephen is described as being 'full of faith and of the Holy Spirit'. Acts 6:15 it tells us that, when brought before the Jewish leaders, the Sanhedrin, Stephen's face was 'like the face of an angel'.

EXPLORE with Open Doors

- How do we 'build a temple with our own hands'?*

A temple is something we build ourselves to 'keep God in' but in effect it keeps God out. A temple, implies Stephen, is an attempt to 'manage God' but in so doing we lose the very essence of what God is. God cannot be managed by us. But we can know God in the unlikeliest of places. A temple doesn't have to be a building. It could be a long held tradition or an artefact.

- Imagine that you are an orthodox, pious worshipper who is visiting the Temple and you hear what Stephen says and see what happens to him. How do you respond? Are you angry? Upset? Confused?
- Read Acts 6:13–14. What exactly is Stephen being accused of?

False witnesses accused him of blasphemy – a crime punishable by death. The blasphemy was that [the false witnesses claimed] Stephen claimed that Jesus of Nazareth would destroy the Temple in Jerusalem and change the Mosaic customs.

- Stephen's speech lists many places outside the Temple – and, indeed, Israel – where people encountered God in a powerful way. Have you ever encountered God in an unusual, or even an 'impure' place?
- What are the ways in which we seek to keep God under control? Is it through tradition? A building? A doctrine? *

*Watch the video.

Session	Sunday	Title	Reading from Acts
4	9.5.21	'It takes a smashing'	Acts 8:1–8; 12–13

QUESTIONS from St Peter's

- Who was Philip?

The Philip of Acts 8, often called the Deacon or the Evangelist, should not be confused with Philip the Apostle, a disciple of Jesus and a speaker of Hebrew. Philip the Deacon must have been a Greek speaking Jew as he first appears in Acts 6:5 as one of the seven deacons chosen by the Holy Spirit and appointed by the apostles to represent the interests of Greek speaking widows in the distribution of food, along with Stephen who was martyred.

EXPLORE with Open Doors

- What would go through Philip's mind as he fled Jerusalem? How would he feel?
- 'Now those who were scattered went from place to place, proclaiming the word.' (Acts 8:4). Why were these fleeing followers willing to share the gospel that had got them into so much trouble in Jerusalem? (See Acts 1:8; 2:32, 4:19-20)
- In the video, Ron claims that persecution does two things: it pushes power down to people who have never had it before, and pushes people outward to places they have never been before. Why do you think this is? Have you seen this happen?
- Have you experienced a time of loss or smashing? Could you see God at work in that?

Session	Sunday	Title	Reading from Acts
5	16.5.21	'The believers lowered him in a basket'	Acts 9:1–25

QUESTIONS from St Peter's

- Who was Paul?

Originally called Saul, Paul first appears to us in Acts at the stoning of Stephen, approving of his death. [Acts 7:60] Unlike the other apostles, Paul was a well appointed personality: trained in the Jewish law as a Pharisaic rabbi and a Roman Citizen, Paul had everything going for him: good education, wealth and powerful connections. His original career leads him to very actively persecute the early Christians until, one day, he comes face to face with the risen Lord Jesus whilst on his way to persecute believers in Damascus.

EXPLORE with Open Doors

- Put yourself in the place of Paul, being lowered in the basket. How do you think he felt?
- Read Acts 9:3-6. What is Jesus' accusation against Paul? Why does Jesus say, 'You are persecuting me', when Paul is attacking His followers?
- "In the persecuted church, Christians realise they are in trouble, and go to God about it. In the Western church, Christians forget they are in trouble, or in a fight, and even if they do remember, never manage to find the time to go to God about it." Do you agree?
- Remember, Jesus said "love your enemies". He didn't say, "don't make any". Does your faith make enemies?

Session	Sunday	Title	Reading from Acts
6	23.5.21	'They were called Christian'	Acts 11:19–26

QUESTIONS from St Peter's

- Where Antioch and what was special about it?
Apart from Jerusalem, the Antioch in Acts 11 played a more important role in the early church than any other city. After Rome and Alexandria, Syrian Antioch was the largest city in the Roman Empire, located at a key junction of trade routes. Here, the first Gentile church was founded and believers were first called Christians. It was the base from which Paul travelled on his missionary journeys. Syrian Antioch, on the Easter side of the River Orontes, is sometimes confused with the separate, smaller town of Pisidian Antioch, which was in Roman Galatia, a part of modern day Turkey.

EXPLORE with Open Doors

- Imagine you are a citizen of Antioch who hears about this new group of Jesus' followers. Or that you are a fellow school pupil of Alexamenos in Rome. Why might you choose to mock these 'Christians'?*
- Describe Barnabas' relationship with Paul. (Check out Acts 4:36; 9:26–28; 15:36–41; Galatians 2:11–14.) Why do you think Barnabas recruited Saul? What qualities might Saul have had that would have helped with this young church?
Barnabas was the first member of the church in Jerusalem to overcome his fear of 'Saul the persecutor of believers' and to be an advocate for his acceptance into the church. As an outsider himself, Barnabas was from Cyprus, he might have also understood the cultural prejudice faced by such a person as Saul when encountering the apostles. With his background and education as a rabbi, Saul would have brought new skills to the early church. In particular, as well as great energy, he brought a more strategic mindset to the mission of the church. He was also self-financing: as a tent maker he could earn a living as he travelled.
- We should expect to be mocked and looked down on. That's what people do when their worldview is threatened. Have you been mocked for your beliefs? How did you feel? And how did you respond?
- In the video, Nick says that we can give people the tools to defend themselves against abuse and persecution. What kind of tools would be useful and appropriate?

*Watch the video.

Session	Sunday	Title	Reading from Acts
7	6.6.21	'They were tentmakers'	Acts 18:1–17

QUESTIONS from St Peter's

- On all his travels, Paul supported himself financially as a tentmaker. What were the occupations of some other members of the early church?

Priscilla and Aquila were also tent makers – Acts 18:3; Luke was a physician - Colossians 4:14; Lydia was a trader in purple - Acts 16:14; Peter and Andrew were fishermen - Matthew 4:18; Matthew was a tax collector - Matthew 9:9; Jesus was a carpenter- Mark 6:3.

EXPLORE with Open Doors

- In the video, Nick describes an early church meeting in the shop of Priscilla and Aquila. When did they meet? What did they do? What do we have in our services that they didn't? How might you replicate an early church meeting like that today?*

The early church in Corinth met on the first day of the week (Sunday). They would encourage each other and pray together but there would be no New Testament. Instead, the worshippers would rely on the stories and accounts of Jesus that had been passed around orally and memorised. Today we tend to meet in a purpose built building – back then people met in each other's houses or shops. Today, the persecuted church meets in people's houses and the people memorise huge chunks of the Bible.

- Read Acts 18:9-10, where Paul has a vision from the Lord. Can you think of other times when Paul has had a message in this way? Or other people in Acts?

Paul received a message from Jesus when he was on trial in Jerusalem. [Acts 23:11] Stephen also received encouragement just before he was martyred. [Acts 7:55-56]

- "Jesus was always calling people to movement, because it is only when you move out of your comfort zone that you find out how strong your faith really is." Have you experienced this? Is Jesus calling you out of your comfort zone right now?
- The early church carried their Scripture in their heads and their hearts. Is memorising Scripture part of your Christian practice? Are there significant passages that you could learn as individuals or groups? Or are there other ways to remember the truths of Scripture?

*Watch the video.

Session	Sunday	Title	Reading from Acts
8	13.6.21	'In every city lies persecution'	Acts 20:17–38; 21:7-14

QUESTIONS from St Peter's

- In Acts 20:34 Paul says that 'these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions'. How did Paul do this?

In session 7 we learned from Acts 18:3 that Paul's occupation was as a tent maker, a job that would allow him to travel light and to keep on the move.

- In Acts 21:8 it says that Paul stayed with Philip the Evangelist, one of the Seven. What would have been Philip's first language?

Greek (not Hebrew). Philip the Evangelist was one of the seven deacons who were appointed by Jesus disciples to represent the interests of the Greek speaking Jewish widows who were being discriminated against in favour of the Hebrew speakers. [Acts 6:1-5]

- Consult a map of Paul's 3rd journey and find the locations mentioned in these readings. Why does Paul never seem to stay in the same place for very long? Have you stayed in the same place for a long time recently? Would you ever consider moving for the sake of the Gospel? Is there somewhere you have previously been but to which you would not consider returning because of danger or a bad experience?

In video 7, Nick Page tells us that 'Paul was a travelling evangelist and preacher and was always being kicked out of places like Philippi and Thessalonica.' In this session, we find out Paul's reaction when he is warned not return to Jerusalem. Perhaps Paul's response could be a guide to our own journey of faith.

EXPLORE with Open Doors

- Imagine you are among that group advising Paul about his next move. What arguments would you use to persuade him not to go up to Jerusalem?

Paul's advisers might have reminded Paul about the stoning of Stephen [Acts 7:58] for blasphemy as interpreted by the Jewish leaders, and about James, brother of John, who was executed by King Herod to gain popularity among the Jews. [Acts 12:2]

- In these passages there are repeated images of being bound, imprisoned or captured. But in Acts 20:22-23, Paul describes himself as a 'captive to the Spirit'. What do you think this means?

- Paul's friends were able to pray, in the face of all the warnings and anxieties: "The Lord's will be done." Has there been a time in your life when you had to pray that prayer? Perhaps you are facing a similar time, now?

- "In the Christian life, the only defeat is disobedience." Are there areas in your life where you want to claim Christ's victory? How are you being called to follow Christ instead of your own desires?