

Chapter 28: New Beginnings

Acts is a book of _____.

Names were always inextricably tied to _____ and _____.

I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me.

John 17:11-12

1. Jesus said to _____ in His name.
2. What thoughts are invoked in others by the mention of _____?

The second undeniable theme throughout the book of Acts is the _____.

And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us everything he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people.

Ephesians 1:13-14

A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church. To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another he gives the gift of special knowledge. The Spirit gives special faith to another, and to someone else he gives the power to heal the sick. He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and to another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to know whether it is really the Spirit of God or another spirit that is speaking. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, and another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. It is the one and only Holy Spirit who distributes these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.

1 Corinthians 12:7-11

Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into Christ's body by one Spirit, and we have all received the same Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:13

I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

Matthew 3:11

One key role of the Spirit for all: the Spirit as *paraclete*.

I will ask the Father, and He will give you another [Helper/Counselor/Advocate/Friend/Comforter] to be with you forever.

John 14:16

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an [Advocate/Helper/Priest-Friend/one who speaks for us] with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

1John 2:1

- He stands _____, as to plead a defendant's case in a court of law.
- He helps us in our weaknesses to _____.

The Spirit helps us with our weakness. We do not know how to pray as we should. But the Spirit himself speaks to God for us, even begs God for us with deep feelings that words cannot explain. God can see what is in people's hearts. And he knows what is in the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit speaks to God for his people in the way God wants.

Romans 8:26-27

- The *paraclete* is our Helper and Advocate before the _____.

But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you at that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speaks, but the Holy Spirit.

Mark 13:11

- He is a source of _____.

Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or are hungry or cold or in danger or threatened with death? No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us."

Romans 8:35,37

The Lord will keep all his promises; he is loyal to all he has made. The Lord helps those who have been defeated and takes care of those who are in trouble.

Psalms 145:13-14

The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Psalms 34:17-18

- The *paraclete* is the one who gives _____ in times of battle.

I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will give you mighty inner strength through his Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 3:16

Today's Equipping Challenge:

With whom do you need to _____?

Discussion Questions

1. What one name, when you hear it, for good or bad, evokes the most emotion in you?
2. What can we do to unleash the incredible power of the Holy Spirit already present within us?
3. Which role of the *paraclete* do you most need at the moment?

Teaching Script

When you come right down to it, aren't we all in an in-between place? We know that we are foreigners in a strange land, and our real home lies elsewhere. But in each of our Lower Stories, we frequently find ourselves saying, "In the meantime...at least for now..." Some of us are in an in-between time professionally; some are recovering from wounds, professional, emotional or spiritual, and need an in-between place to heal, to re-equip ourselves for the journey ahead. Some of us are in an adjustment time that requires we rearrange our priorities, because we suddenly find ourselves with children, or maybe without children, or maybe without a job.

If you think you might currently be an in-between person in an in-between time, then Acts is just the book for you. In this book, Luke chronicles the passage from one era to another, and all the things that change in this revolution called Christianity.

In this book, we have deserters turning into outspoken, single-minded preachers. We have a brief time of waiting followed by a stunning moment of empowerment and conviction. We have a New Community that shared everything, sacrificed for each other and had favor with outsiders.

We see these previously frightened disciples now performing some of the same miracles Jesus did, and then being thankful that they had the privilege of suffering for Jesus' name. We have a man named Stephen selected because he was "full of the Holy Spirit" and wise, who tragically became the first martyr for this new movement. We see his death as a catalyst to persecution that drove the gospel message out of Jerusalem and into Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth. We see a dyed-in-the-wool, foam-at-the-mouth legalist like Saul have a literal come-to-Jesus moment, and then be commissioned to be the uttermost parts of the earth mouthpiece. We see eyes opened and paradigms destroyed as Peter and Cornelius form the first Odd Couple and thereby open salvation to the Gentiles, which paved the way for Paul to then *go* to those uttermost places and preach the Gospel.

Acts is a book of *transitions*...

- Ministry of Jesus to ministry of apostles
- Hiding to boldness
- Presence of Jesus to presence of Holy Spirit
- Old covenant to New
- Israel as God's chief witness to the Church
- The place of worship from synagogues to churches in homes
- Jews to Gentiles
- Circumcision to baptism (Acts 10)
- Jerusalem to rest of world
- Law to grace

No wonder Acts is called the book of transitions. As the gospel was intended to transform the heart, it's fitting that the first book to chronicle this new life in Jesus is a book of evolution and passage from old to new, from centralized to de-centralized, from closed-minded to free-thinking.

But for all the things that do change in Acts, there's one crucial thing that does not change: God's character and His plan

In fact, Luke went to great pains in his narrative to ensure his readers understood the unchanging nature of the God who was bringing about this revolution. And he did it by focusing on one thing: the Name of Jesus.

The name of Jesus is so powerful, Paul says, that at the sound of it every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth. Thirty-two times in the book of Acts alone the name of Jesus is used with its power to heal, to baptize, to suffer for, to claim the authority of God Himself.

In Biblical times, there was one thing that reflected and described someone's character and mission more than anything else: their name.

In the Bible, a name refers to "nature," because names were given to reveal something about the person. At the ratification of His covenant with Abram, God changed "Abram" (Exalted Father) to "Abraham" (Father of the Multitudes). God told Abraham and Sarah to name their long-awaited son *Isaac*, because when Sarah and Abraham were told their child would be born at the assisted-living center, they laughed. God joined in with the joke when He said to name their boy Isaac, which means "laughter." Jacob was a schemer, trickster and con man, and his name means "to take by the heel," i.e., to trip up, to deceive (Gen. 25:26). Later though, the angel would rename him "Israel" which means "Prince with God." Remember Hosea the prophet, who was told to go marry the prostitute Gomer? Their children's names were not Jennifer, Tiffany and Michael. They were "God will scatter", "No mercy", and "Not my people."

Names were always inextricably tied to *character* and *mission*. Today, it would be as if the name "Max" had a Latin root meaning "preacher of Jesus", or the name "Randy" was translated "lover of neighborhoods."

Listen to a few of the times the name of Jesus is mentioned in Chapter 28 of *The Story*:

- Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ...
- Peter said, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!"
- By faith in the name of Jesus, this man (the cripple) was made strong.
- It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him.
- The High Priest questioned them saying, "By what power or what name did you do this?"
- Resp: "It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead that this man stands before you healed."
- Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved.
- Sanhedrin: We must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name.
- They commanded them not to teach or speak at all in the name of Jesus.
- After they were jailed, rulers said, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name."
- After flogging them, they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus.

- The apostles left, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.
- After Saul's Damascus road experience, God told Ananias, "I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

Why so many references to the power of the Name? Because for all the transitions we mentioned in Acts, for all the momentous things that were changing, one thing stood immovable and with no shadow of turning: the character and mission of God. The great Upper Story had just been revealed in Christ, but it was important for the disciples to see that God, who had set this great Upper Story of Jesus in motion back in the Garden of Eden, who had spoken through His Son, was the same God who would bless them and empower them through the Holy Spirit. His name reflects His unchangeable nature. Just as He told Moses to tell Pharaoh that "I AM" had sent him, so in the Gospels, Jesus claimed that name for Himself, as the unchanging, never-wavering God of the universe.

Remember Jesus' prayer for His disciples?

I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me.

John 17:11-12

This matters today for two reasons:

1. **Jesus said to ask anything in His name.** As we pray for healing for others, for release of demonic oppression, for His glory to be revealed through us, it's as if we have at our disposal this nuclear energy source that fuels and ignites the prayers of the saints. The power of His name is unlike any other, as we summon that power to intercede for others. This is not to be taken lightly, as we barrel through the end of a prayer, "in Jesus' name amen." Covering our prayers in the name of Jesus invokes power, authority, and dominion given Him by the Father. So if we take away nothing else this morning, let us pause at the end of our prayers to contemplate the force we are begging to unleash at the mention of His Name—and let us pray believing He is faithful to that promise.
2. Second, it causes us to ask the question: **What thoughts are invoked in others by the mention of our name?** If after I have left this church, someone mentions my name and the typical reaction is (roll eyes), then it's not just *my* name, but the name of *Christ* that I wear that has also suffered loss. Has God been honored by the legacy of my name? Of yours? In your world, in your office, what comes to people's mind at the mention of your name? Something to consider....

The focus on the character of the name of God assured the disciples. But what could have transformed them from faint-hearted to faith-filled? From enfeebled to empowered?

The work of the Holy Spirit. **The second undeniable theme throughout the book of Acts is the Holy Spirit.** The Spirit takes center stage in Acts and this chapter of *The Story*—and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit marks a revolutionary change in God's historical plan of redemption. The Holy Spirit was both a physical sign (sounding like a

wind, looking like a fire), but also a high octane fuel that was so strong that Peter himself, freshly forgiven and still smelling of fish, stood up and gave perhaps the second greatest sermon on record. This was an unmistakable sign that Jesus' pledge had come true, and the promised Helper had arrived.

There is perhaps no theological subject that is the focus of more debate than the existence, role and power of the Holy Spirit. Across the religious world, there is a full spectrum of belief on what the Spirit is and does.

- Jehovah's Witnesses state in their *Watchtower* publication, "...God's holy spirit is not a God, not a member of a trinity, not coequal, and is not even a person...It is God's active force..."
- A fundamentalist church preacher was recently asked about the Holy Spirit's role today, and he said the only place we find the Holy Spirit today is in the pages of the Bible.
- On the other end of the spectrum, in some charismatic circles, the focus has rested on the showiness of the charismatic gifts, with **some** teaching that the **absence** of splashy gifts is a sign of spiritual immaturity.

Let's take a moment and look at what the Bible has to say about who the Spirit is and what He does. He is:

- The One through whom we draw near to Jesus—our relationship with God is through the Holy Spirit.
- He participated in creation (Genesis 1:2). He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8-11). He is the one who reveals the word of God and inspires the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:20-21).
- He is distinct from the Father and Son: *However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.* (Rom. 8:9)
- The Spirit knows the mind of God (1 Corinthians 2:10-14)
- The Holy Spirit indwells the community of the Church in a special way. *Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?* (1 Corinthians 3:16).

It's really important that we have biblical perspective of the Spirit's work in our lives. When Peter promises "the gift of the Holy Spirit" to those who believe, he is talking about a supernatural delivery at the moment of receiving Christ. Paul says in Ephesians:

And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us everything he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people.

Ephesians 1:13-14

That means all believers.

And even though our terms have gotten a little mixed up because some people say "indwelling" of the Spirit, and others say, "baptism" of the Spirit, biblically, it's all the same thing.

Let's explore this...

Much of 1 Corinthians 12-14 was written to correct the church at Corinth because they had taken their eye off the ball when it came to the Holy Spirit's residence in every believer. They got more concerned about outdoing one another than about preserving unity in the Body. The spiritual gifts that come from the Holy Spirit are not meant for personal aggrandizement, but for the equipping of the saints for service. Listen to Paul:

A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church. To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another he gives the gift of special knowledge. The Spirit gives special faith to another, and to someone else he gives the power to heal the sick. He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and to another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to know whether it is really the Spirit of God or another spirit that is speaking. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, and another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. It is the one and only Holy Spirit who distributes these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.

1 Corinthians 12:7-11

Now listen to verse 13:

Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into Christ's body by one Spirit, and we have all received the same Spirit.

Do you remember what John the Baptist said about Jesus?

I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

Matthew 3:11

The important thing to remember is this: we have all been baptized, or indwelt, with the Holy Spirit when we believed in Christ and accepted Him as our Savior. Nowhere in the Bible does it say, "Be baptized in the Spirit! Be indwelt by the Spirit! Be gifted by the Spirit!" Why? Because it's God's work, and because, as Ephesians said, he gave all of us the promised Holy Spirit as a guarantee, or a seal, the moment we believed. We've all been baptized in the Spirit.

But as 1 Corinthians says, it looks different for everybody. "He alone decides which gift each person should have." A few people I've talked to at our church have a visionary gift for seeing angels present at key, holy, transforming moments. Do elders have an intercessory gift of healing? James calls them to anoint the sick and pray over them.

But occasionally, as we see in Acts, there was a special outpouring of the Spirit as a powerful witness to break new ground, as when Philip preached to the Samaritans, or Peter to Cornelius, or Barnabas to believers in Antioch. Each time special gifts, such as speaking in tongues, were given over and above the baptism of the Holy Spirit given to all believers.

Does that happen today? Can God still provide a miraculous, special filling of the Spirit in certain circumstances, to ratify His will? Certainly He can. Do people still have the gift of speaking in tongues? Contrary to some thought, speaking in tongues is not an unintelligible language or ecstatic utterances that no one can decipher. In the Bible, speaking in tongues would be you or me speaking English but a guy over there hearing Russian or Japanese. In the first century, that gift was crucial to communicate the gospel to the entire world. But today, in a time where you can click on a webpage and instantly translate it from English to Portuguese, it's not as needed. Could God give a miraculous gift of tongues to a missionary who was going to a foreign land? He could... but I know our Wycliffe missionaries spent years learning Quiche and Yalunka before they began to speak it and translate the Bible into those languages.

Paul said in Corinth, the various gifts of the Spirit were distracting from the overall purpose. Flashiness is not the point—serving the body to build up unity, with whatever gift you have, is the point.

So the question is, having been baptized by the Spirit with your body now its temple, how are you engaging the gifts He's given you? What are those gifts? It doesn't matter if they're visible or behind-the-scenes—the question is, how are you serving the body of Christ with them, and what are you doing to promote unity?

In the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit is mentioned more than 50 times, as He becomes the catalyst for the creation and spread of the Church. He sends missionaries, appoints elders, opens eyes, sounds like a mighty wind, looks like a fire, fills new believers, heals the sick, and opens jail doors and chains.

But there is one gift we all equally receive from the Spirit that is on full display in the book of Acts: the Spirit as *paraclete*. This is the Greek word first mentioned by John, meaning “one who comes along side.”

In John 14, Jesus described a “Helper” or an “Advocate” that would come after He left. The Greek word *paraclete* is used for both Christ and the Holy Spirit:

I will ask the Father, and He will give you another [Helper/ Counselor/ Advocate/ Friend/ Comforter] to be with you forever.

John 14:16

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an [Advocate/Helper/Priest-Friend/one who speaks for us] with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

1 John 2:1

- **He stands along side, as to plead a defendant's case in a court of law.** When Stephen was dying, he looked up and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father.
- **He helps us in our weaknesses to pray.**

I don't know about you, but my prayer life is one place where I need the most help. I get frustrated because what I've prayed for doesn't happen. I get frustrated because maybe it's because I've prayed for MY will to be done and not HIS. I get

frustrated because I want to pray for big things, like the eradication of all child abuse and sexual predators from the world, but I don't know how. I get frustrated because I pray for deliverance from my sins and they keep creeping back. This is why Romans 8 is so important:

The Spirit helps us with our weakness. We do not know how to pray as we should. But the Spirit himself speaks to God for us, even begs God for us with deep feelings that words cannot explain. God can see what is in people's hearts. And he knows what is in the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit speaks to God for his people in the way God wants.

Romans 8:26-27

- **The *paraclete* is our Helper and Advocate before the world.**

But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you at that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speaks, but the Holy Spirit.

Mark 13:11

That was certainly true of Peter and John as they repeatedly got into trouble for preaching the name of Jesus.

- **He is a source of comfort.** He is our Comforter. We take comfort knowing He is called along side us through whatever trial we may face. The Holy Spirit provides tender mercy for God's people in their times of grief and pain, just as He comforted Peter and John and Paul in prison.

Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or are hungry or cold or in danger or threatened with death? No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

Romans 8:35, 37

The Lord will keep all his promises; he is loyal to all he has made. The Lord helps those who have been defeated and takes care of those who are in trouble.

Psalms 145:13-14

The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Psalms 34:17-18

- **The *paraclete* is the one who gives strength in times of battle.** Paul, Peter and John could preach without fear because their Helper was always beside them.

In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

Romans 8:37

I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will give you mighty inner strength through his Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 3:16

I pray that you will begin to understand the incredible greatness of his power for us who believe him.

Ephesians 1:19

In other words, a *paraclete* “has your six.”

And there’s your Equipping Point or Equipping Challenge for this week:

With whom do you need to “come along side?”

If we are the literal body of Christ in the world today, are we not doing some of the work of the Spirit of Christ by our willingness to walk alongside someone? It doesn’t mean we have all the answers, or even understand all the questions. But could we, as we lead our families and marketplaces, be willing just to walk along side, pray along side someone in a tough time? Might we be a “comforter” to a sleep-deprived wife caring for sick kids? A helper to a son or daughter who gets ribbed at school? An advocate for a co-worker who offers to pray for their situation?

This week, let’s take the lead by serving, by helping, by comforting.

But the Scripture that strikes me the most is Jesus’ announcement at the Feast of Tabernacles:

“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.

John 7:37-39

Rick Yaris from our church knows the value of a stream of living water. In Iraq four years ago, he was a victim of an IED explosion, with burns over 70% of his body. He remembered his training, and kept rolling on the ground to try and smother the flames, but he couldn’t—the burning just wouldn’t stop. Exhausted, he lay on his back, and told God that he was ready to go, if this was his time. But then he turned his head to the right and saw that he was right next to a flowing canal.

His flames were extinguished, and through 30 surgeries on his arms and face, and the loss of both legs, he ministered first in Iraq, then Germany, then BAMC. The Spirit saved Rick’s life literally in a stream of living water. Just like these characters in Acts, Rick has been through a huge transition in his life; and like Jesus, his scars are still plain to see.

And today, like Rick, and Peter and John, and Stephen, and Paul, there is nothing that is beyond the power of the Spirit who raised Christ from the dead to gift us, to comfort us, guide and advocate for us. This is the gift that Christ came to bring: once-for-all justification, and a Helper, Comforter and River to convict and cleanse, to counsel, and to build His home within us.

[Prayer]

Lord Jesus, we come in the power and majesty of Your Name, the Name above all names, the Name that cast out demons, raised the fallen, and immerses us into a likeness of death. Thank You that Your name Immanuel means You are with us; that as Jesus, You are Savior; that as Yeshua, You are our Messiah, our Anointed One.

And today we especially thank You for the individual gift of your Spirit, who convicts us, counsels and advocates for us. Fall fresh on us even now...work a mighty power through us today above all we could ask or imagine. Remove any artificial boundaries our feeble minds have placed on Your work, and astonish us today with what You can do with a believing heart. Even as you breathed on Your disciples, Lord Jesus, breathe the Spirit on us that we would be filled, empowered and loosed by that same power that raised Jesus from the dead.

In the matchless, glorious, conquering name of Jesus we pray...