

## Reading Schedule for April 17-23, 2017

On the heels of our Easter celebration, it is time to be inspired by the early church. I cannot go through any calendar year without reading the Book of Acts. The Book of Acts begins where the gospels leave off. In some ways it is the most exciting book, because we are still living the catalyst that began the church. The Holy Spirit came in power and the church was birthed. We will enjoy our journey through this book as we anticipate stepping through these amazing stories for the next several weeks.

**April 17 – Acts 1:1-11:** “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (v.8) This is a verse that I have memorized because it still applies today. The Holy Spirit would be the enabler for us to be the witnesses Jesus has called us to be. The Holy Spirit gives us courage, boldness, confidence, insight, ability and authority. We need all of these gifts to fulfill Christ’s mission. As believers in Jesus Christ you can experience the power of the Holy Spirit in your life. Have you asked the Holy Spirit to fill you? The Holy Spirit already lives in you, but he could have an even greater influence in your life if you opened your heart to more of him. Actually, the idea is that he would have more of you. Do you agree? How do you respond to this launch in this inspiring book?

**April 18 – Acts 1:12-26:** “They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.” (v.14) This is always an appropriate way to prepare yourself for ministry. The people were gathered in prayer, asking God to fill them and use them. It was a gathering of women and men devoted to Jesus Christ. It was the beginning of the first church. Jesus said that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days, so they waited and prayed. They could not do this on their own. The first step to yielding to the Holy Spirit is found in prayer. Prayer directs our thinking and shapes our heart. Prayer is communion with God. I wrote a small book called, “10 Minutes a Day.” This coming Sunday it will be available to you for your help and inspiration. I believe it is one of the keys to having a meaningful prayer life. Why did the early church begin with prayer?

**April 19 – Acts 2:1-13:** “Utterly amazed, they asked: ‘Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?’” (v. 7 & 8) Do you see the inclusive nature of the church?! Christianity is not limited to any race or group of people. Christ offers salvation to all people without regard to nationality. People were visiting Jerusalem from all over, just as God had planned. The miracle of the Apostles speaking in these various languages would give evidence to the power of the gospel and the way of salvation. These miracles would enhance the spreading of the gospel to all peoples. This is a very inspiring event. What inspires you about it?

**April 20 – Acts 2:14-41:** “Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: ‘Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.’” (v.14) I love that Peter is the spokesman for the Apostles. He had been outspoken previously, but now his heart was softened, and ready to be used by God. He had been an unstable leader, but now you can see humility and confidence blended together through his life. This was a new Peter. I love the evidence of change in his life. If you read

his letter, 1 Peter, you will see what I mean. For example, read chapter 5, verses 6-8. Peter is such a great example to us that God can restore us even when we fall. After we have sinned greatly, through his redeeming forgiveness, we are refined and more useful in his hands. Our response can be one of humility and obedience, just like Peter. Do you agree? How so? What stands out to you in his message to those gathered in Jerusalem?

**April 21 – Acts 2:42-47:** “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” (v.42) I want you to read through this text two or three times as a point of meditation, and a glimpse of what the church could be. The principles in this verse are a great outline for discipleship at New Harvest. We study God’s Word, we are in fellowship with each other, we honor the message of communion, and we pray for God’s work among us. This is all in the context of group life. We have 17 small groups, and we believe it is the right way to organize our church and to grow in our faith. Are you in a group? What do you learn from these principles? The most convicting aspect of the early church to me is their willingness to share with each other. Many times they sold what they had so that the needs of others could be met. God used this contagious Christian community to draw more and more people to himself. What do you learn about the early church in this short paragraph?

**April 22 – Acts 3:1-10:** “Then Peter said, ‘Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.’” (v.6) We not only see Peter speaking boldly on the day of Pentecost, but now we have him ministering with great faith. It won’t be long in the launch of the church where the Apostle Paul becomes the focal point, but right now Peter is setting the pace for serving God and believing God to do powerful things through faith. When someone says, “In the name of Jesus,” they are saying, “By the authority of Jesus Christ.” Obviously, the Apostles were doing this healing through the Holy Spirit’s power, not their own. I love the response of the crippled man as he was healed . . . walking and jumping and praising God. The Lord has done great things for you and me. How do we respond? How did God speak to you through this short reading today?

**April 23 – Acts 3:11-26:** “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord . . .” (v.19) I have talked about repentance in our study in 2 Corinthians. Repentance means to turn to God. We learned that there is worldly sorrow that does not lead to repentance, versus godly sorrow that brings us to repentance. The intention of God’s forgiveness is meant to not only cleanse us, but lead us on the right path. Acknowledging your own sin and turning away from it is how God wants to sanctify our lives. Each of us is called to repentance. Whenever you notice your pathway is going in the wrong direction, we are called to repent. When we do, the Lord will cleanse and refresh us, just as he did Peter. Peter is a great example of repentance, and now he is speaking the word of repentance to the people, that they might be renewed in their faith. How do you understand this for your own life? What stands out to you from Peter’s spoken word?

**Prayers: Pray for the week following Easter that those who heard the gospel message would be continually stirred by the Holy Spirit.**