

Acts 1: Radical Acts Introduction

Radical = “having a profound or far-reaching effect”

The Holy Spirit is a **radical** blessing to every believer and to the world. And, just as fiery lava and ash erupt from a volcano and flow out to build new land, the Holy Spirit’s fire erupts through the lives of believers to build Christ’s church.

Book of Acts

- Acts is a book of **history**.
- Acts is a book of **theology**.
- Acts is a book of **biography**.
- Acts is a book about **human relationships** influenced by the transforming firepower of the Spirit. Men and women fired up and not only ready for adventure but living it.

Adventure with the Spirit

Adventure = “an unusual or exciting, typically hazardous, experience or activity.”

Our English word adventure comes from the Latin for “about to happen.” What a way to look at life following Jesus—something’s about to happen! And, not always what you expect.

- The Spirit is the One who makes the Christian life possible.
- The Spirit is the third person of the trinity.
- The Spirit is central to salvation.
- The Spirit fills us with Himself and transforms us from the inside out so that our character looks more like Jesus and our lifestyle glorifies God more and more.

Getting fired up and ready for adventure!

“The work of God can only be carried on by the power of God. The church is a spiritual organism fighting spiritual battles. Only spiritual power can make it function as God ordained. The key is not money, organization, cleverness, or education. No matter the society or culture, the city or town, God has never lacked the power to work through available people to glorify His name...The times are urgent, God is on the move, now is the moment to ask God to ignite His fire in your soul!” (Jim Cymbala, Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire)

Acts 2 — Something's About to Happen

(Life as we've known it may never be the same!)

What were they expecting?

*"For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."
(Acts 1:5)*

What did they receive?

- Spirit Baptism is the Spirit's work of uniting us with Christ – identifying us with Christ's death, burial and resurrection. (Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12)
- Spirit Baptism is the Spirit's work of making all believers permanent members of the Body of Christ. (1 Cor. 12:13)
- Spirit Baptism occurs once and for all at the salvation of each believer. (Gal 3:26-27; Eph. 4:4-5)
- Spirit Baptism is a change of state and is not validated by any particular outward sign. (John 3:8)

Experiencing Spirit power

- He helps us understand what the Bible teaches. Has someone explained something to you about the Bible, and you understood what they were saying? That's the Spirit inside of you helping you to understand. *John 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:13*
- He gives us the words to tell others about Jesus and say that Jesus is God. Have you wanted to tell someone about Jesus but didn't know what to say, then all of a sudden the words just popped into your head for you to tell that person about Jesus? That's the Holy Spirit living inside of you prompting you with the right words to say. *John 14:26; 1 Corinthians 12:3*
- He gives us assurance that we are God's children. Have you ever felt really loved by God? That's the Spirit inside of you letting you know for sure that you are God's child, and He loves you. *Romans 8:16*
- He encourages us to do what pleases God. Do you have a desire to please God with your life? That's the Holy Spirit inside of you giving you that desire. *Romans 12:11; Jer. 33:31,33*
- He helps us to feel joy as we serve Jesus and when we do the right things. Have you ever felt really good when you chose to do the right thing or chose to be helpful? That's the Holy Spirit inside of you letting you feel God's pleasure. *Romans 14:17-18*
- He encourages us to not want to do what doesn't please God. Have you ever felt something tugging at you inside when you were tempted to do something wrong? That's the Holy Spirit living inside of you nudging you, reminding you what doesn't please God so you can choose not to do that. *Galatians 5:16*
- He enables us to love others. Have you ever started loving someone even more after you started praying for them? That's the Holy Spirit living inside of you doing that. *Galatians 5:22-23*
- He makes us want to sing praises to God, in our hearts and out loud, and be thankful for God's goodness. Do you like to sing praises to God? Do you feel thankful to God for His goodness to you? That's the Spirit living inside of you filling your heart with praise and thanksgiving to God. *Ephesians 5:18-20*
- He prays for us when we need help or don't know what to pray for. Have you ever had a huge problem and didn't know what to ask God to do about it, but God took care of the problem anyway? That's the Holy Spirit living inside of you working to take care of your need before you even ask. *Romans 8:26-27*

Acts 3 — Jesus & the Kingdom

To the crowd in Acts 3:13-21, Peter declared that God was giving the Jews an opportunity to repent after the sign of Christ's resurrection. They had refused the "pre-Cross" Jesus; now they were being offered a post-resurrection Messiah. Why was it so important for them to understand Jesus as both Messiah King and Messiah as Suffering Savior?

God, King of Creation—Direct Rule

Kingship is God's idea; it refers to the sphere of His rule in the universe. God, the king has always been Sovereign, Omnipotent and Omniscient. His kingdom is eternal. *Daniel 4:34*

Man's Rejection of God's Kingship through Sin

Adam & Eve disobeyed God in that one area of accountability. Because of sin, man's efforts to rule the earth would be much more difficult. God now delegated His rule to people whom He allowed to be rulers.

God's Rule through Humans—Representative Rule

Human rulers permitted a sphere of political rule under God's permission and direction; God's rule became a representative rule. *Romans 13:1; Daniel 5:21; Genesis 10:8-12; Genesis 17:6; Genesis 35:11; Genesis 49:10*

God set up Israel as a theocratic nation; God would be its king. The sacrificial system temporarily removed sin from the people so God could dwell with them. *Deuteronomy 33:1-5*

Israel's Rejection through Desiring a Human Ruler

Israel was not content with the theocracy, though. The people demanded a physical king as a strong human ruler. *Deuteronomy 17:14, 15; 28:36; 1 Samuel 8:5,22*

Hannah's song in *1 Samuel 2:10* is the first reference in the Bible to the Lord's anointed—i.e., his anointed king, anticipating the establishment of kingship in Israel and the Messianic ideal in David.

God and Israel's King—Representative Rule

For God's chosen people, a rightful king was designated by God and anointed by His representative (usually the High Priest) with the approval of the people. He ruled by virtue of a covenant between God and His people, to which the king was a party.

God and Messiah—Promise of Direct Rule

The Lord's Anointed—"Anointed" is the English translation of the Hebrew word. "Messiah" is the interpretation (transliteration) of it. Since the king is anointed, Messiah equals King.

Messiah as a king differs from earthly kings in that he is also Lord. *Psalms 2:2,10; Isaiah 33:22; 43:3,15*

Messiah as a descendant of David is one God has chosen and enthroned to rule in His name as the official representative of God's rule over His people. The ultimate fulfillment is in Jesus. *2 Samuel 7:14*

Israel Waits through the Exile, Greek Empire, and Roman Empire

Exile—Spiritual Changes

Cut off from the temple, divested of nationhood and surrounded by pagan religious practices, Israel focused on

- The Law (Torah, first five books of the Old Testament) rather than nationhood
- The belief that they were God's people which found its expression through personal piety and prayer rather than the sacrifices now denied to them. The center of worship was the synagogue.

Result: Judaism became a faith that could be practiced wherever the Torah could be carried which helped preserve Judaism but also prepared the way for the Christian gospel.

Israel in the Greek Empire

After Alexander the Great's death, Israel was ruled by descendants of Alexander's general, Ptolemy, from Egypt. The Ptolemies were considerate of Jewish religious sensitivities.

In 198 B.C., descendants of another of Alexander's generals, Seleucid, took control. Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.) imposed Greek language and culture on Israel. A segment of the Jewish aristocracy adopted Greek ways; the majority of Jews were outraged. Laws were enforced with extreme cruelty as Antiochus attempted to eradicate the Jewish religion by prohibiting some of the central elements of Jewish practice, destroying copies of the Torah (the Pentateuch), and requiring offerings to the Greek god Zeus. The crowning outrage was the erection of a statue of Zeus and the sacrificing of a pig in the Jerusalem temple itself!

Opposition to Antiochus led by Mattathias, an elderly villager from a priestly family, and his five sons (one named Judas the Maccabee—thus the Maccabean revolt). The event is memorialized in the celebration of Hanukkah. Judas Maccabeus destroyed a Greek altar and killed Antiochus' emissary to their village, triggering a 24-year war resulting in the independence of Judah with Mattathias's sons as rulers. Sadly, the dynasty became corrupted and turned into an aristocratic Hellenistic regime (represented later by the Sadducees). Those who had supported the Maccabean revolt soon fell out of favor. The Pharisees (whose sect formed during this turbulent time period) were actually persecuted by their own leaders for about 30 years of this period in Israel's history.

Israel in the Roman Empire

In 63 B.C., an expanding Roman empire entered in the picture. Pompey took Jerusalem after a three-month siege of the temple area, massacring priests in the performance of their duties and entering the Most Holy Place. This sacrilege began Roman rule in a way that Jews could neither forgive nor forget!

The Pharisees built a "hedge" around the law to enable Jews to live righteously before God in a world that had changed drastically since the days of Moses. Few in number, they enjoyed the support of the people and were the only group to survive the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, thus being the spiritual progenitors of modern Judaism. The Roman Senate appointed Herod, a non-Jew, king in 40 B.C. Subject to Rome.

God Sends Messiah Jesus—Direct Rule Offered

At his birth, Jesus came announced as a King. For 3 years as an adult, Jesus proclaimed God's truth to men and demonstrated that He is God. He delivered men and women from their physical and spiritual ills. The time had come for Him to move on in his role as Israel's Messiah. So, he headed for Jerusalem.

At Bethany, he stopped until the way could be prepared so that when He entered the city people would recognize Him as the Messiah (*Luke 19*), fulfilling Zechariah 9:9 by riding on a young donkey. The crowds understood that Jesus was presenting Himself as the Messiah, capable of bringing in the Kingdom. He entered as a king like David would have entered.

The crowd quoted from *Psalms 118*, a Messianic psalm of praise traditionally sung at Passover. They are filled with joy that Jesus at last is making public proclamation of His Messiahship. All history had pointed towards this single, spectacular event when the Messiah publicly presented Himself to the nation, and God desired that this fact be acknowledged.

Israel Rejects Messiah and Direct Rule Once Again

As a King, he was rejected as He Himself prophesied. *Luke 19:14; Luke 18:31-33*

When He was crucified, He died as the King of the Jews. *Mt 27:37*

Because the people did not recognize the time of God's coming to them, the city would be totally destroyed. Roman soldiers did this starting in AD 70. Roman general Titus conquered it after a 1-year siege. Only the towers of Herod's palace and a part of the western wall of the temple platform were left. 600,000 Jews were killed. The rest were taken to Rome as slaves. Incidentally, Titus wanted the Temple spared, but it was inadvertently (or so he thought) torched. God's promise was fulfilled.

Why the king had to suffer first to deliver his people:

It was God's plan to deal with sin once and for all so he could have a restored relationship with His creation. *Isaiah 53:5; Luke 24:26; Matthew 26:54*

Humans are less sensitive to their sin than they are to their circumstances. The Israelites never could come to grips with their sins. The leaders had their laws. They didn't need a savior. Because they declared themselves righteous God was expected to do the same. So, they didn't recognize who Jesus really is. *Luke 19:42,44; John 1:10-11*

God gave them further opportunity to repent. Acts 3:17-21

This offer of salvation and of the Kingdom pointed both to God's graciousness and to Israel's unbelief. God was giving the Jews an opportunity to repent after the sign of Christ's resurrection. They had refused the "pre-Cross" Jesus; now they were being offered a post-resurrection Messiah. Peter's words underscore Israel's rejection. They had been given the sign of Jonah but still they refused to believe.

Jesus—King of Believers

In addition to the sovereignty of God manifested in political governments and their rulers, Scripture also bears testimony to a spiritual government...

- In which God rules in the hearts of men
- True ever since the beginning of time
- Includes all who are willingly subject to God, whether men or angels
- Especially includes the rule of God in the hearts of believers in the Church age

The Church Age began—the Kingdom of God present in the hearts of believers through the Holy Spirit. *Colossians 1:13*

Jesus—King of Kings

All will see His visible and glorious kingdom on the earth after the Second Coming. In Revelation, Jesus Christ, the Lamb, is introduced as King of the kings of the earth. *Revelation 1:5; 19:16; 17:14*

Jesus is sovereign over the Kingdom of God until at the resurrection He delivers the Kingdom to His Father. *1 Corinthians 15:24-28*

The Kingdom of God is the dynamic rule of God manifested in Christ to destroy His (spiritual) enemies and to bring to men the blessings of God's reign. The New Testament pictures two victories of God's kingdom:

- Victory over death. Death is denied spiritually through Christ's death and resurrection. Death will be physically defeated at the end of the millennial reign of Christ.
- Victory over Satan. Defeated spiritually at the Cross. Satan will be physically defeated in the lake of fire at the end of the Millennium.

The Millennial Kingdom, Direct Rule of God on Earth.

In the Millennial Kingdom, Christ will actually be the supreme political ruler as well as the spiritual leader and object of worship.

Psalm 2 and *Isaiah 11* picture an absolute monarch who will put down wicked men and bring them to subjection. Neither is the description of the present age nor of heaven.

Major features of the Government of the Millennium are:

- It will be over the entire earth, far beyond the boundaries of any previous earthly kingdom or the kingdom of David himself.
- In establishing this worldwide government, God fulfilled His purpose that man should rule the earth. Christ as the last Adam is able to fulfill this goal. *Daniel 7:13-14*
- The government of Christ will be one of absolute authority and power. *Revelation 19:15*
- During this time Satan is bound and rendered inoperative. The only source of evil in the world will be the sin nature of men still in their human flesh.
- All who oppose him will be punished by even to the point of death. No one will be allowed to rebel against the King. *Psalm 2:9*
- Such an absolute rule does not characterize the rule of Christ over His Church or over the world in the present age.
- The government of Christ in the Millennium will be one of righteousness and peace. *Isaiah 11* and *Psalm 72* are classic passages describing this.
- His reign will be characterized by light. *2 Sam 23:3-4; Psalm 36:9; 27:1; 72:1-8*
- The Messiah will have 4 throne names: 1) Wonderful Counselor, 2) Mighty God, 3) Everlasting Father, and 4) Prince of Peace. He will also be called "The Lord Our Righteousness." *Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6*

Jesus is Our King — Every Knee Will Bow!

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:5-11)

Acts 7 — Death Swallowed Up in Victory!

Death and the Resurrection

- Death is the penalty for sin. No death anywhere before Adam sinned! (Romans 5:12)
- The penalty has been paid in full. (2 Timothy 1:9-10)
- Therefore, we are no longer in bondage to death. (Hebrews 2:14)
- The body decays, but the soul leaves this "earthly tent." (Ecclesiastes 12:7; Luke 8:55)

What Doesn't Happen to the Soul?

NOT Annihilated—the atheistic view.

- Jesus teaches of consciousness beyond this life. (Luke 16:19-31)
- Reuniting of body and soul of both believers and nonbelievers expected. (Acts 24:15)

NOT Soul Sleep—the insensitivity of the soul after death.

- Conscious souls after death can remember, talk, experience pain or pleasure. (Luke 16:19-31)

NOT Reincarnated—the continual cycle of death and rebirth, broken only through self-effort.

- Man dies once, then the judgment. (Hebrews 9:27)

NOT Purgatory—intermediate state where believers' souls are "purified" before entering heaven.

1. It's God's job to perfect us. (Philippians 1:6)

- Christ died to clear our consciences of guilt from sin. (Hebrews 9:14)
- The best candidate for "purgatory" went directly with Jesus to God's presence. (Luke 23:43)

2. Purgatory violates two scriptural truths.

- Truth #1: Belief, not behavior, is the basis for receiving eternal life. (John 5:24-29)
- Truth #2: Only the blood of Jesus cleanses from sin. Cleanses us from all sin and unrighteousness. (1John 1:7) Jesus canceled our debt of sin and forgave us ALL our sins. (Colossians 2:13-14)

3. What about praying for the dead?

- No purgatory so no need.
- No second chance so no need.

4. What about praying to the dead?

- Worship God and serve Him only. (Matthew 4:10)
- Jesus is our High Priest; go directly to Him. No one is closer to Him than you! (Hebrews 4:14-16; 7:24-25)

5. What about babies and children who die before choosing Christ on their own?

- Trust the character of God.
- Depend on the grace of God.
- Jesus paid the penalty for everyone. (Matthew 18:5-6,10; 19:14) Children are born with an innate sense of belief or trust in the existence and love of God the Father and Jesus. As they grow older, adults convince them not to believe it and thus reject Jesus.

What Does Happen to the Soul of a Believer?

It goes to HEAVEN—the spiritual realm in which the glory of God's presence is manifest, and in which dwell the angels of God, and all believers who have departed this world. This is what we do know:

- Heaven opened, the glory of God was visible, Jesus was standing ready to receive Stephen's spirit. (Acts 7:55-60)
- Jesus brings the souls of the dead believers with Him, so they must be with Him first. (2 Thessalonians 4:14)
- Jesus wants us to be with Him in glory! (John 17:24)
- He is preparing a place for us so we can be with Him. (John 14:3)
- Our immediate destination after death. (Philippians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 5:8)
- We receive comfort. Angels carried Lazarus there. (Luke 16:19-31)
- There is joy and pleasure in God's presence. (Psalm 16:11)
- We are released from the struggle with sin. (2 Corinthians 5:19)

Confidence for Your Faith

In Christ, we share in his victory over death! We grieve, but we grieve not as those who have no hope, rather as those who are certain of our reunion with loved ones who have gone before, of receiving a glorious body that will never weaken or decay, of entering a wonderful new life beyond our fondest dreams, and of forever being with the Lord! The death of Jesus Christ was SUFFICIENT for all sins but it is EFFICIENT only when you personally put your faith in Him.

"Early pagans thought of graveyards as the dwelling places of departed spirits, but they had no pleasant names for these places. The [Romans] cremated bodies and placed the ashes in urns set in niches. These niches looked like dovecotes, so they were called columbaria. But the Christians used the name koimatarion, from which we get cemetery. The koimatarion was the barracks of the soldiers. Thus, at death the believer falls asleep as at the sounding of Taps. But the angel will blow the trumpet of resurrection, just as the bugler sounds reveille. Then the dead in Christ will come out of the barracks of the dead, to be forever with their glorious Captain." (Donald Grey Barnhouse)

Acts 8 — Sharing Jesus

He gave His life for you so He could give His life to you, so He could live His life through you.

Christianity is Christ!

The Disciplemaking Pathway

1. Disciplemaking is a process that Jesus taught His own disciples.
 - He ENGAGED people who needed to know Him. To engage is to gain the attention of someone. In engineering, it's to bring something together and cause it to interlock.
 - He ESTABLISHED His followers. To establish is to build a solid foundation, to give roots that hold firmly. He taught His followers what they needed to know about Himself and His mission.
 - He EQUIPPED them to engage people who needed to know Jesus and establish them in the faith. To equip is to provide tools needed to accomplish a particular purpose—make disciples.
 - Through the equipped ones, Jesus EXPANDED the ministry to the ends of the earth. *Matthew 28:19-20.*
2. Disciplemaking is helping people come to faith in Christ, grow in Him, and equipping them to go and help others repeat this process.
3. Disciplemaking is a ministry lifestyle, not a program.

Intentionally Engage the Ones Who Don't Know Jesus

- Jesus was intentional at engaging the lost during his 3½ years of ministry. *Mark 1:32-39; 5:18-20*
- Compassionately look at what life is like for the non-Christians around you.
- Recognize where they are in your life and step into their lives.
- Consider ways you can intentionally build a relational connection with those non-Christian women in your sphere of influence.

*"If we aren't careful, the busyness of life will lead to intentional blindness."
(Doug Pollack)*

Put Specific Women on a "Pray and Watch" List

Put the names of those whom we are trying to engage on a list. Pray for the Holy Spirit to draw her to Jesus. Keep on praying that, as many times as you think about or see that person, envisioning the Holy Spirit going to work in that person's life, drawing that person to Jesus. Join Him when you see what He is doing. Plan an intentional time to spend with at least one on your "pray and watch" list.

Acts 9 — Radical Transformation

Dare to Be Different

Dare to Evaluate — Romans 12:2a

List your positive and negative character traits developed by your 20s.

- Which ones have been useful to God as you serve Him? Star* them.
- Which ones have been redirected or need to be changed by God? Put an arrow → next to them.

Positive Character Traits

Negative Character Traits

Dare to Submit — Romans 12:1

1. Recognize that all of you belongs to God anyway, and “Daring to Submit” to Him is for your good and pleases God.
2. Renew your mind from the world’s way of thinking & feeling & doing to God’s way of thinking & feeling & doing.

Dare to Expect Results — Romans 12:2b

“As Paul persisted in preaching Jesus as the crucified Savior and sin-bearer, the unexpected happened: pagans as well as Jews and God-fearers believed the message and found their lives transformed by a new, liberating power which broke the stranglehold of selfishness and vice and purified them from within. **The message of Christ crucified had thus accomplished something which no body of Greek philosophic teaching could have done for them.**” (Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free, F. F. Bruce, page 25)

Acts 10 — Lightbearers to the Gentiles

Exodus 19

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

God called a community of people out of darkness into His wonderful light so that they would be able to lead others to Him as light-bearers in the dark. But, first Israel needed to know the light herself. God used Moses to accomplish the task...

A Community Born — Exodus 7-18

- The baby forms in the Egyptian womb
- Labor pains (the plagues) — Exodus 7:5; 8:10; 9:14; 14:4,18; 12:38
- Birth of the baby (through the Red Sea) — Exodus 6:6-7; 14:31
- Infant care (pillar of cloud or fire; manna, water from a rock) — Exodus 13:22

A Community Called — Exodus 19:1-19

- Treasured by love — Deuteronomy 14:2
- Priests by calling —
- Holy by lifestyle — Exodus 19:7-19; 20 and after (The purpose of the Law was to help them know what holiness is—how to live life so they would be a holy and separate people who could represent God well to the rest of the blind world.

A New Community Commissioned — Acts 2, 10

The 10 commandments were given to Israel, not to the Church. We can learn from them about holiness. But, our best example of what holiness looks like is Jesus. We find out what a holy lifestyle for a New Testament Christian looks like in the New Testament writings.

God’s mission for His people is the same. Represent God to the world who is calling people out of their darkness into His wonderful light. We are the people of God with the message of God—our message now includes salvation by faith in Jesus Christ.

Acts 13 — Following Deception Trails

In Acts 13, “God-fearing” women were influenced to join the wrong cause. What steps do you take to protect yourself from being influenced in a manner that does not strengthen the cause of Christ? Jesus warned us about this in Mark 13. Though He is speaking about the prophetic future, Jesus stresses that a disciple’s greatest danger is not war, not calamity, not persecution or betrayal. It is **deception**.

Truths we can know about the future:

- Jesus said conditions on this planet are not going to get better but worse! We can forget the idea of world peace until He comes back. (Mark 13:7-8)
- Persecutions and betrayals will affect Christians until Jesus returns. He’ll give us strength to endure them plus words to say, and we are not to be afraid. (Mark 13:9-13)
- This great time of worldwide, massive tribulation hasn’t happened yet. The destruction of Jerusalem was not the worst that had happened before or even since that time. It is still to come. (Mark 13:14-23)
- Jesus is physically coming back to planet earth, and no one is going to miss it. Isn’t that good news? We just don’t know when. (Mark 13:24-27)
- Jesus is leaving His disciples behind with certain responsibilities. To them and to all of us, He says, “Stay alert.” (Mark 13:33-37)

Watch Out That No One Deceives You—Mark 13:5

Deception affects the direction our minds are going—and our bodies follow. Our Bible is like a map, and the Holy Spirit is our compass, always orienting us to Jesus and His way. Without relying on our map and compass, we are vulnerable to being deceived. At least 33 New Testament verses warn believers about being deceived or led astray. Deceiving us is one of Satan’s best means for making us ineffective at pursuing Christ completely. We put all our energy going in the wrong directions.

“But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” (2 Corinthians 11:3)

Deception trails are anything that wastes our time, energy and money by sending us in a direction away from our responsibilities as Jesus’ disciple: 1) knowing Christ and following Him only, and 2) being His witnesses as we let Him live His life through us.

Deception Trail #1: Ignore the Map and Compass and Go by How You Feel

The Deception:

- I feel like some of my sins are not forgivable.
- I feel I am not good enough for God to love. Or else He wouldn’t let bad things happen to me.
- I feel like I have to still earn His approval by working harder or being better.
- If it feels right, it must be right.

Relying on how we feel about something rather than on the Bible and the Holy Spirit to guide us makes us vulnerable to being deceived.

God’s Truth:

- You feel like some of your sins are not forgivable. Colossians 2:13-14 says that God forgives us completely when we trust in Jesus Christ. All of our sins were future at that time.

- You are unsure that God can love you. Romans 8:38-39 says that God's love is unconditional, regardless of our imperfections, because we belong to Him through our faith in Jesus.
- Take any other emotion that seems to be running your life—fear, worry, anger, or impatience. Trust the Holy Spirit to help you find a scripture that teaches truth. Repeat it to yourself, believing it. Let your emotions respond to God's Word. They'll line up eventually.

Deception Trail #2: Great Gear And A Great Body Make For A Great Hike.

The Deception:

- Getting selfish will make us better and happier—having better gear (such as a nicer home, newer car, stylish clothes) or a better body (slim, wrinkle free, big boobs), we will be happier. Pleasing our physical senses is the priority in our lives to make us strong enough to get through life.

The Truth:

- Having a great body and great stuff does not guarantee endurance through trouble. Denying oneself and following Jesus does. If we truly believe that knowing Christ and following Him, being His witness in our world, is our priority, it would show in how we spend our time, energy and resources. We can ask Jesus to help us prioritize our lives because He understands.

“Then, we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.” (Ephesians 4:14)

Deception Trail #3: Assume All Signposts Are Accurate

The Deception:

There are some cultural signposts that are misleading, maybe even rotten at the bottom. They keep us from being effective at following Jesus (2 Timothy 4:3-4). Example:

- Women are superior to men.
- Children don't need fathers because women are sufficient in themselves.
- Men can't be trusted because they are imbeciles.
- “Let's make God female” or worship the goddess within

The Truth:

Don't let other peoples' thoughts be a replacement for the Bible. (Colossians 2:8) Always compare what people are telling you with what is in the Scriptures. (Acts 17:11)

As believers, we need to stay within sight and sound of Jesus' voice, which are the Bible and the Holy Spirit within us. When we don't, we make ourselves vulnerable to following a deception trail. So...rely on the map and compass to follow signposts that also rely on the map and compass!

The Challenge

What changes do you need to make today to keep you alert to deceptions and to rely on your map and compass so that you can hike Jesus' trail **effectively**?

Acts 15 — Balance Liberty with Love

“In essentials, Unity, in non-essentials, Liberty, in all things, Love”

The book of Romans clearly teaches that Christians are free from bondage to the Jewish Law given by God through Moses, which governed the daily life of every Israelite. Christ brings liberty. But, with liberty comes responsibility. Romans 14 reveals that to enjoy our liberty without offending one another within a love-bonded community, we must **balance liberty with love**.

Is it a moral issue?

ABSOLUTES are truths essential to the Christian faith, never change and are true for every believer, in every nation, during every time period of history.

- Absolute doctrines are those defining true Christianity.
- Absolute behaviors are those specifically revealed in the scriptures as right or wrong as we seek to love God and glorify Him.

NON-ABSOLUTES are not essential to the Christian faith. They can change over time and can be different in every culture and every time period.

- Jesus may give us a PERSONAL CONVICTION about something that is right or wrong for us individually. They can change over time as we grow in our faith.
- PREFERENCES are issues on which you have a personal liking, but aren't right or wrong for anyone.

Is it stunting someone's spiritual growth?

- 1 Corinthians 10:23—Principle #1: I may have the complete freedom to do something myself, but it may not be beneficial to me or to those around me. Jesus and me need to determine that.
- 1 Corinthians 8:10—Principle #2: There is a distinction between public and private use of liberty. When your brother or sister “sees you” and is distressed by what you are doing, that's a signal that you need to talk to Jesus about whether or not to do that activity.

Is it disrupting unity within the Body of Christ?

For every issue:

- What are the facts?
- Is this a moral issue? Is it stunting someone's spiritual growth? Is it disrupting unity within the Body of Christ?
- How should I respond?

Talk to Jesus about any issue that you don't know how to handle. If it's a moral issue, Jesus will not only show you where in His Word to find the answer. He'll also give you the strength to stand firm on His truth. If it's a non-absolute, He'll let you know within your heart whether it's right or wrong for you. If He doesn't give you a personal conviction about it, you can follow your preferences and enjoy your liberty.

Whenever any other person is distressed by your freedom, **balance your liberty with love**.

Acts 16 — The Tale of Two Teens & a Lady

Two teens heading for ministry

- Mark
- Timothy—

Special characteristics of teens

- Available
- Risk takers
- Desire to make a difference
- Abundant energy

Training starts when they are young

1. Ministry involves serving. *Phil. 2:3-4*

2. Ministry involves sacrifice. *Phil 4:10-13*

- Being flexible
- Being practical
- Being able to wait
- Being content with what God provides.

3. Ministry involves giving. *Phil. 4:14, 16-18*

- Giving is part of the Christian's nature
- Practice giving through hospitality

4. Ministry involves trusting. *Phil. 4:19*

Acts 17 Part 1: Christian Character

Character is...

- Moral strength—can distinguish right from wrong *and* deliberately choose right.
- Integrity—honesty, living the truth, humility.
- Fortitude—can endure pain or troubles with courage.

Character Is Evidenced by Reputation (Ruth 3:11; Proverbs 12:4; Proverbs 31:10)

Character Gains Wisdom from Scriptures (*Acts 17:11; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Psalms 119:9; 1 Thessalonians 2:3-6a*)

Character Is Enhanced Through Hard Times (*Romans 5:3-5; Deuteronomy 8:2; Philippians 4:13; 1 Thessalonians 1:5-8*)

Developing Character (*Prov 22:15; Genesis 18:19; Deut. 6:4-9*)

Bad company corrupts good character (1 Corinthians 15:33)

Corrupts = to destroy the honesty of; to ruin morally; to contaminate; to render useless.

Scriptural Examples

- Paul's Warning (*2 Corinthians 11:19-20*)
- Bad Characters (*Acts 17:5*)
- Samson (*Judges 13*)
- Rehoboam (*2 Chronicles 10*)

Good company strengthens good character

- Starts at home—emphasize the family unit.
- Other families—interact with children and adults of all ages.
- Quality peers—parents take an active role in helping children make quality friendships.

Acts 17 Part 2 - Christian Worldview

God Was Once Known

Example: the ancient Chinese language

禁 (to forbid) = 林 (tree) + 示 (to command)
犧 (to sacrifice) = 牛 (ox) + 羊 (sheep) + 秀 (unblemished) + 戈 (spear)
義 (righteousness) = 羊 (lamb) + 我 (me)
船 (boat) = 舟 (vessel) + 八 (8) + 口 (person)

What is a Biblical worldview?

- Choosing truth over relativism
- Choosing true spirituality over a form of religion that denies its power (2 Timothy 3:5)
- Choosing to confront the culture rather than being conformed by it

"The great difference between present-day Christianity and that of which we read in these letters is that to us it is primarily a performance; to them it was a real experience ... They do not hesitate to describe this as Christ 'living in' them." (J. B. Phillips)

"Looking in the eyes of the children, knowing that tomorrow is at stake. When the choice is up to them, will they have the strength to say? 'We won't bend and we won't break, we won't water down our faith, we won't compromise in a world of desperation.' What has been I cannot change but for tomorrow and today, I must be a light for future generations." (from "Future Generations" by 4Him)

Acts 18 — Women as Mentors

The Example of Priscilla (Acts 18:24-26)

God's Plan for Mentoring (Titus 2:1-7)

Why does God give this responsibility to older women (older in age or in experience)?

What qualities should a woman mentor possess? (vs. 3)

- Reverent in the way she lives
- Trustworthy in her speech
- Not addicted to much wine or anything else that makes her ineffective
- Able to teach what is good

What are the younger woman needing to learn? (vv. 4-5)

- To be husband-lovers
- To be children-lovers
- To be sensible or self-controlled
- To stay pure
- To be a *keeper* of home = one who observes, guards, or preserves something valuable.
- To be kind
- To be subject to her own husband
- So as not to malign or dishonor the Word of God

Response — be available and teachable

God's woman is a unique creation responsible to God, to love Him, to obey Him, to serve Him, influential in her sphere. (Vickie Kraft)

Acts 20 — The Loyalty Factor

Loyalty to Jesus Christ and His way of approaching life requires our humility and obedience.

Loyalty is the quality of devotion or attachment to somebody or something. It's both a feeling and an action. Loyalty is being tested everyday in homes and businesses and human relationships across this planet. Who demands your loyalty or has the right to it? How good are you at remaining loyal? Loyalty affects how you approach life.

1. Jesus as Lord deserves our loyalty

- Choose to declare to Jesus, "I am YOUR woman forever."
- Choose to remain loyal to Him as our master everyday, ignoring all those other voices calling for us to follow their ways of approaching life. (Acts 20:19)

2. Loyalty requires humility

Humility and gentleness go hand in hand (Matthew 11:28; Ephesians 4:1-2).

Humility is the opposite of self-assertiveness and self-interest...it is not occupied with self at all. (Vines)

3. Humility leads to obedience

*We often learn about life and discern our life path / actions in the wrong way. It isn't the long-term accumulation of knowledge; it's how obedient to God we are with the information we can immediately discern. **God would rather I have understanding of 2 verses that I obey immediately than 20 verses that I don't. Obedience is the key to discernment. It's not "capture and remember;" it's "hear and obey."** (Chip Ingram)*

4. Obedience offers protection

Obedience is necessary to protect yourself from those who distort the truth and draw us away from Jesus and His way of approaching life.

Acts 21-24 — When Life's Realities Hits

We can learn to face life's realities with courage and peace, entrusting ourselves and our loved ones to a God who loves us dearly.

Remember that God is Good—Luke 8:22-25

1. Pagan View of Trouble
2. Biblical View of Trouble *John 16:33*
 - Truth #1: We live in a fallen, evil, cursed world.
 - Truth #2: God has chosen from the beginning to give human beings the freedom to act
 - Truth #3: God, who is great and powerful, will one day wrap up history and fix it.
3. We can entrust ourselves and our loved ones to a God who loves us dearly. *Romans 8:37-39*

Release Your Fear—Luke 8:26-39

- Fear can be real or imaginary.
- God doesn't want us to live in fear. *Psalm 56:3*

Receive Courage and Peace with Thanksgiving—Luke 8:40-56

- We have a compassionate God. *Matthew 11:28-30*
- We have a creative God.

Applying Faith to Fear

1. Confront it. What fears do you have right now?
2. Ask about each one: What is my worst-case scenario?
3. Consider: If the worst I can imagine happens, could I handle it through the presence and power of Jesus Christ?
4. Pray: Thank the Lord for His presence and His goodness.
 - Ask Him for the courage and peace to ride out the storm. Where the Word of God is clear, you can claim God's promises by faith.
 - Anytime, you can ask—but you cannot hold God to promises He hasn't made—such as immunity from natural calamities, illness, and troubles.
5. Live life securely in Him: Take common sense precautions. Trust God to show you what to do and give you strength when you are weak.

God loves me; He knows what is going on; He can do something about it. But, even if he doesn't change the circumstance, I know I can trust His goodness.

Acts 28 — Faithful Endurance

“We can faithfully endure hard times and have joy in the process.”

As Christians, when we encounter stress, pressure, pain and suffering, we are more susceptible to wiggle, run, compromise or sin to avoid the suffering. The Bible encourages suffering believers to **persevere**.

Consider it joy whenever you face trials of many kinds

- Joy = a deep, inner gladness, regardless of circumstances. That comes only from a relationship with God.
- Face = to fall into the midst of something that surrounds you.

Knowing the testing of your faith develops perseverance

From the Greek word, *hypomone*, a strong word that means “bearing under.”

- Holding up a load with staying power, tenacity and stick-to-it-iveness.
- The quality that enables a person to stand on his or her feet when facing a storm head on.

Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

If you need wisdom, just ask...

What trials are you facing today?

Persevere...joyfully...listening to His voice...drowning out all the others...even when it hurts...when you're tired...when you want to give up...when you want to settle for less.

Romans 5:1-5 (NIV)

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

James 1:2-6 (NIV)

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

Believe it or not, faithfully enduring the hard times will lead to a joyful walk.