

# How to use *explore*



## Issue 109

The 90 daily readings in this issue of *Explore* are designed to help you understand and apply the Bible as you read it each day.

## It's serious!

We suggest that you allow 15 minutes each day to work through the Bible passage with the notes. It should be a meal, not a snack! Readings from other parts of the Bible can throw valuable light on the study passage. These cross-references can be skipped if you are already feeling full up, but will expand your grasp of the Bible. *Explore* uses the NIV2011 Bible translation, but you can also use it with the NIV1984 or ESV translations.

Sometimes a prayer box will encourage you to stop and pray through the lessons—but it is always important to allow time to pray for God's Spirit to bring his word to life, and to shape the way we think and live through it.

## We're serious!

All of us who work on *Explore* share a passion for getting the Bible into people's lives.

We fiercely hold to the Bible as God's word—to honour and follow, not to explain away.

1

Find a time you can read the Bible each day

2

Find a place where you can be quiet and think

3

Ask God to help you understand

4

Carefully read through the Bible passage for today

5

Study the verses with *Explore*, taking time to think

6

Pray about what you have read

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# Welcome to *explore*

Being a Christian isn't a skill you learn, nor is it a lifestyle choice. It's about having a real relationship with the living God through his Son, Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that this relationship is like a marriage.

It's important to start with this, because it is easy to view the practice of daily Bible reading as a Christian duty, or a hard discipline that is just one more thing to get done in our busy lives.

But the Bible is God speaking to us: opening his mind to us on how he thinks, what he wants for us and what his plans are for the world. And most importantly, it tells us what he has done for us in sending his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. It's the way that the Spirit shows Jesus to us, and changes us as we behold his glory.

Here are a few suggestions for making your time with God more of a joy than a burden:

- ☛ *Time*: Find a time when you will not be disturbed. Many people have found that the morning is the best time as it sets you up for the day. But whatever works for you is right for you.
- ☛ *Place*: Jesus says that we are not to make a great show of our religion (*see Matthew 6:5-6*), but rather, to pray with the door to our room shut. Some people plan to get to work a few minutes earlier and get their Bible out in an office or some other quiet corner.
- ☛ *Prayer*: Although *Explore* helps with specific prayer ideas from the passage, do try to develop your own lists to pray through. Use the flap inside the back

cover to help with this. And allow what you read in the Scriptures to shape what you pray for yourself, the world and others.

- ☛ *Feast*: You can use the "Bible in a year" line at the bottom of each page to help guide you through the entire Scriptures throughout 2025. This year, each day explores a different genre of the Bible. On Sundays, you'll read from a New Testament epistle; on Mondays, from the first five books of the Bible ("the Law"); Tuesdays cover Old Testament history books; Wednesdays enjoy the Psalms and Thursdays Old Testament poetry; Fridays focus on the prophets, and then on Saturdays you'll read through the Gospels. You can find the original version at [bible-reading.com/bible-plan/html](http://bible-reading.com/bible-plan/html).
- ☛ *Share*: As the saying goes, *expression deepens impression*. So try to cultivate the habit of sharing with others what you have learned. Why not join our Facebook group to share your encouragements, questions and prayer requests? Search for *Explore: For your daily walk with God*.

And enjoy it! As you read God's word and God's Spirit works in your mind and your heart, you are going to see Jesus, and appreciate more of his love for you and his promises to you. That's amazing!



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# ACTS: An introduction

*The book of Acts is the second of two books written by Luke; the first is the Gospel that bears his name. In this book, Luke invites us on the disciples' adventure!*

## The setting

I've always been fascinated by maps. As a boy I would create maps of new cities, just for fun! Maps help us understand movement, and that's especially important in the book of Acts.

### Read Acts 1:1-5

- ❓ *In what city does Luke's sequel begin? Write your answer below.*

### Read Acts 28:16, 30-31

- ❓ *In what city does Luke's story end (note v 16)? Write your answer to the right of the arrow above.*

The story of this book moves from the city of King David of Israel to the city of the Roman Caesar.

- ❓ *What does this tell you about how the gospel moves (see v 8)?*

## Apply

- ❓ *What "cities of Caesar" need a movement of the gospel today? What part do you play in this advance?*

## Leading roles

### Read Acts 1:12-17

- ❓ *Who gathered for prayer? Who stepped up as the leader in that gathering?*

### Read Acts 12:25 – 13:3

- ❓ *Who emerged as the lead character of the book?*

These two people feature so prominently in Luke's narrative that you can divide Acts into two parts based on their ministries: the former in chapters 1 – 12, the latter in chapters 13 – 28.

But behind the scenes stood a far more important actor.

## The director

### Read Acts 1:1

Luke says that his first book records "all that Jesus began to do and to teach".

- ❓ *What is the implication of the word "began"? Who is the real main actor in his second book?*
- ❓ *Traditionally Christians call this book "The Acts of the Apostles". What might be a better title?*

## Pray

Thank Jesus for his continued action through his people—through you! Ask him to empower your church by his Spirit, that your works might not merely be yours but his.

# Themes

Before we dive into Acts 1, let's look again at the book as a whole. As Luke tells the story of the early church, he weaves together five themes that we'll see over and over.

## Word & deed

### Read Acts 8:4-8

- ❓ *What did Philip do in Samaria (v 5)?*
- ❓ *What else did he do (v 6)?*

Luke is not shy about miracles. As we walk through Acts, take note of the combination of “deed ministry” and “word ministry”.

### ▼ Apply

- ❓ *Which of these kinds of ministries comes most naturally for you? How can you grow in the other area?*

## Stories of conversion

### Read Acts 2:37-41

This is the first of literally dozens of stories of conversion in Acts. Each is slightly different from the others, but five marks of conversion pop up time and time again:

- Repentance
- Faith
- Confessing (or calling on) the Lord
- The gift of the Spirit
- Water baptism

Not all five appear in every story, but each presents some combination of them.

## Love & community

### Read John 13:34-35

- ❓ *How did Jesus say that everyone would recognize his disciples?*

We can look at Acts as the fulfilment of Jesus' prediction.

## Opposition & suffering

### Read Acts 16:22-25

Much blood will be spilled in Acts, from beatings to stonings to martyrdom. We'll see throughout that God never lost control over the situation—and discover a reason for hope in our suffering.

## Sharing the message

### Read Acts 4:8-12

The apostles' teaching, often called the *kerygma* (Greek for “proclamation”) includes a number of elements: Old Testament prophecy, fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah; the exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of God; the coming of the Holy Spirit; the future return of Jesus; the need for repentance and faith, to receive forgiveness and the Holy Spirit.

### ▼ Apply

Here's where we can join the story of Acts! Jot down the names of friends and family who do not yet know Jesus. Ask the Spirit to open their hearts to the good news. Keep this list handy—we'll come back to it often!

# The sequel begins

*Luke begins his sequel where he left off in his Gospel—with Jesus raised from the dead, giving his final instructions and ascending to the presence of God.*

## Forty days

### Read Acts 1:2-4

In three short verses Luke records what Jesus did during the 40 days between his resurrection and ascension. Jot everything he did below.

- ❓ *Why do you think Luke included the detail that Jesus “was eating with them” (v 4)? What does this signify about the resurrection?*

## Waiting for the gift

The first mention in this book of the Holy Spirit is in verse 2.

- ❓ *How would you describe what he does in that verse?*

Theologian John Jefferson Davis describes verse 2 as an example of the “ordinary supernatural”: “The key to a healthy church and Christian life is to operate consistently in the ordinary supernatural, in the conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit, as we preach, meditate on Scripture, and do the work of ministry generally...”

### Read Acts 1:4-8

Luke records a number of actions associated with the Holy Spirit. List them here.

In verse 8 Jesus makes two predictions about his disciples.

- ❓ *What are they? (Hint: each begins with the words “you will”.)*
- ❓ *Do you think these predictions should be understood as promises, commands, both, or neither?*

## There and back again

### Read Acts 1:9-11

In the Bible, clouds often symbolise the presence of God (e.g. Exodus 13:21; 19:9; Luke 9:34-35). Jesus was returning to the Father’s right hand—his exaltation had begun.

The angels’ words in Acts 1:11 seem to be a rebuke.

- ❓ *What should the disciples have been doing instead of looking into the sky, do you think?*

## Apply

- ❓ *If you knew that Jesus would return today and show up at your workplace or home, what would you do differently?*

# He was one of us

*In the ten days between the Ascension and Pentecost, what was on the mind of the disciples? The answer might surprise you!*

## The gathering

### Read Acts 1:12-15

- ❓ *How many people were gathered (v 15)?*
- ❓ *How many does Luke specifically name (v 13-14)?*

Verse 13 is the fourth and final list of the apostles in the New Testament. Compare Acts 1:13 with Luke 6:14-16. What was on their mind? The person who was noticeably absent, Judas Iscariot. As Gospel readers, we know Judas will betray Jesus—but from the disciples’ perspective his very recent betrayal and sudden death were totally startling. How were they to comprehend what Judas had done?

### Read Acts 1:15-22

- ❓ *What was Judas’ original position (v 17)?*
- ❓ *What was the role he and the other disciples fulfilled (v 21-22)?*
- ❓ *What was his crime (v 16)?*
- ❓ *What did he receive for his actions (v 18)?*
- ❓ *How did he die (v 18)?*

When a pastor’s hidden sins or abuses come to light, what is your reaction? How does their sin affect your own feelings about God? The church? Christian leaders in general? Our own response to such scenarios sheds light on what the disciples might have been feeling.

## The plan

Yet they moved forward in faith, showing the path for us when we’ve been let down or betrayed.

- ❓ *What were the 120 disciples doing for 10 days (v 14)?*
- ❓ *Where did they seek answers to the vexing problem of Judas (v 16, 20)?*
- ❓ *Who gave them these answers (v 16)? When?*

It’s no accident that Peter mentions “the Holy Spirit” (v 16). Turning to the Spirit indicates trust in the words of Jesus. When our hearts are vexed by the failings or betrayals of others—or our own sin—Jesus invites us to turn to the Holy Spirit in prayer and Scripture.

### Read Acts 1:23-26

- ❓ *What three actions did the 120 take? (Hint: you’ll find one each in v 23, 24, and 26.)*
- ❓ *How does their plan reflect faith in both the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures?*

## Pray

Give thanks to Jesus for the gift of the Spirit to be present in our distress. Ask him to grant you faith to move forward even when you’re perplexed or hurting.

# I will yet praise him

*This psalm is a pair with the previous one—they may actually be two parts of the same song. Again, we're witnessing searing emotional pain and heated questions.*

## TIME OUT

- ❓ *Have you had cause since last Sunday to talk to yourself in the way the writer of Psalms 42 and 43 does?*

*on with life my way!* They are written out of a real relationship with God: *Look at this bit of my life that's affecting my joyful praise of you, Father—please bring me through it so I can get on with life with you.*

## Read Psalm 43

### Vindicate me

- ❓ *What circumstance does the writer seem to be experiencing (v 1-2)?*

Here, the focus is on the writer's treatment by others. Most of us know the pain of being hated, deceived, lied about. Many of us know what it is like to mourn the death of a friendship, or even a marriage, that we had once relied on. And again, as in the last psalm, it is natural and it is not wrong to ask, *God, if you are my protector, why have you let this happen?* (v 2).

And again, the writer talks to himself about God, and about the future. What we think about the future greatly affects how we feel in the present. Mourning can co-exist with joyful hope only if we know that one day the mourning will cease and the joy will exponentially increase. That is one of the blessings of knowing what eternity with God will be like, and knowing that through faith in Christ that is where we are heading.

## Read Romans 8:18-25

The Bible never downplays our present sufferings. But it always points us to our future glory. It is that future that enables us to smile now, even as we cry.

### Bring me

- ❓ *What does the writer ask for next (v 3)?*  
 ❓ *What does he look forward to, once God has answered his prayer (v 4)?*

There is a subtle, but spiritually crucial, difference between asking God to change our circumstances so that we can enjoy life, and so that we can enjoy praising and delighting in him. Psalms like this are not encouraging us to use God as a genie: *Look at this bit of my life that's broken, God—fix it so I can get*

## Apply

Memorise Psalm 43:5. You may need to say it to yourself today. You will certainly need to say it to yourself one day.

- ❓ *Is there another Christian who needs you gently to draw alongside them, and tell them that it's okay to feel desolate, but that they need to look to their future and find hope there?*

# Filled with the Spirit

*Jesus had instructed his disciples to “wait for the gift my Father promised” (1:4). If they were at all concerned they’d somehow miss its arrival, they needn’t have worried!*

## A supernatural fulfillment

### Read Acts 2:1-4

- ❓ *What did the believers hear (v 2)?*
- ❓ *What did they see (v 3)?*
- ❓ *What were they enabled to do (v 4)?*

The sheer physicality of this supernatural event is striking.

- ❓ *Why do you think the gift of the Spirit came with such physical displays?*

Now let’s look at the Spirit.

- “A violent wind” (v 2). Jesus likened the Spirit to the wind (John 3:8). *What does this tell us about the Spirit?*
- “Tongues of fire” (Acts 2:3). John the Baptist described the Messiah’s ministry as a baptism “with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Luke 3:16). *What does this tell us about the Spirit?*
- ❓ *What two actions did the Spirit undertake in Acts 2:4?*

### ⏪ Pray

Take one minute to offer a prayer of thanksgiving for the Holy Spirit and for his work in your life.

## A timely fulfillment

Pentecost marked the end of barley harvest,

*Bible in a year: Genesis 1 – 3*

a time of joy and thanksgiving for God’s provision. It was one of three annual festivals for which all Jewish men and male converts to Judaism travelled to Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 16:16).

### Read Acts 2:5-11

- ❓ *What did the people hear (v 6-8)?*
- ❓ *What did they see (v 7)?*
- ❓ *How many regions witnessed this extraordinary miracle (v 9-11)? How many of them do you recognize?*
- ❓ *Why do you think God chose Pentecost as the day for the Spirit to come?*

## A confounding fulfillment

### Read Acts 2:12-13

- ❓ *What are the three words Luke uses to describe the emotional reaction of the people (one in v 6, two in v 12)?*

### ⏪ Pray

Take a look at your list of friends and family who don’t yet know Jesus.

- ❓ *Are they more curious (like the people in v 12) or more derisive (like the people in v 13)?*

Ask the Lord to open their eyes to the beauty of Jesus by his powerful Spirit.





# I will pour out my Spirit

*“You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18). Now Jesus starts his massive project, with Peter front and centre.*

## Differing roles

### Read Acts 2:14-16

- ❓ *What three things did Peter do (v 14)?*
- ❓ *What did the other eleven do?*
- ❓ *What about the rest of the 120?*

### ▼ Apply

The Spirit came upon everyone equally, but what the Lord called them to do varied by person. It can be easy for us to become jealous of the opportunities our sisters or brothers have in comparison with our own. Take a moment to ask the Spirit to identify any such jealousy in your heart, and to confess it as sin.

## From one Spirit

When Peter said, “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel”, it was as if he were saying, *This is what we have been waiting for!* And what was that?

### Read Acts 2:17-18

- ❓ *What are the results of God’s act of pouring out his Spirit? There are at least three in these verses.*

“Pouring out” is a remarkable phrase to describe the coming of the Spirit. Pouring normally refers to a liquid. But the Spirit is invisible, like the air.

- ❓ *Why do you think God used “pour out” with reference to the Spirit? What pictures does this phrase bring up in your mind?*
- ❓ *Who are the recipients of God’s act of pouring out his Spirit? How many different groups of people are named?*

### ▲ Pray

The Holy Spirit came on people throughout the Old Testament, but it was a relatively rare occurrence. That’s what makes Joel’s prediction extraordinary—the outpouring would be universal, including everyone. Give thanks to our gracious God for pouring out his Spirit and including you in his promise!

## For everyone’s good

### Read Acts 2:19-21

- ❓ *How many of the wonders and signs Joel predicted were fulfilled literally?*
- ❓ *How many were fulfilled literally if you include what happened at the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension too?*

God’s door is wide open for you in Jesus. When you feel like you’ve drifted too far from him, the Spirit is there to remind you: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”. And that includes you!



# Jesus of Nazareth

Peter has been responding to the charge that the disciples were drunk. Now, he begins to preach Jesus to those who have gathered there.

## The crucified one

### Read Acts 2:22-23

- ❓ *What did God do to point to the identity of Jesus (v 22-23)?*
- ❓ *Who witnessed this (v 22)?*
- ❓ *What crime were the people guilty of (v 23)?*

#### TIME OUT

- ❓ *How did God help you to see the identity of Jesus, and the reality of your sin?*
- ❓ *How can this help you share your faith with those around you who notice that you are different to the world?*

## The Messiah

For Jesus, death by crucifixion was not the end—just as the Old Testament predicted.

### Read Acts 2:24-32

- ❓ *What did God do for Jesus after the crucifixion (v 24, 32)? Look for three different expressions.*

In verses 25-28 Peter quotes Psalm 16.

- ❓ *How do we know David isn't talking about himself in the quoted section, even though he uses the pronouns "I, me, and my" (Acts 2:29)?*
- ❓ *Who was he speaking about (v 30-31)?*

The word "Messiah" means anointed one (v 31). It refers to someone like a priest or

king who was anointed by oil to show that God had chosen them for a special purpose.

- ❓ *For what purposes did God anoint Jesus?*

#### TIME OUT

Passages like this shape how we read the psalms. It's easy for us to adopt the posture of the psalmist, so that the "I, me, and my" refer to ourselves. Or (better) we work to read the psalms in context, from the writers' perspective. But Peter goes one step further: he shows us that we should hear the psalms as though Jesus were reading them, because ultimately he fulfils the "I, me, and my".

## The Lord

Peter closes with one more psalm quotation that connects Jesus' ascension with the outpouring of the Spirit.

### Read Acts 2:33-36

- ❓ *Note the Trinitarian nature of verse 33. Which Person of the Godhead performs which actions?*

## Pray

The resurrection of Jesus is the final and ultimate declaration that Jesus is who he said he is. Give thanks to God that your Saviour "destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10).

# An ever-present help

*How do you respond to trouble? Do you worry about it, deny it, or try to fix it?*

The Israelites were in trouble—surrounded by warring nations, many of whom would have loved to wipe them off the map. How would they cope with this constant threat to national security?

## No fear

### Read Psalm 46:1-3

- ❓ *Why are the Israelites not afraid, although humanly speaking they should be (v 1)?*
- ❓ *Why would remembering these truths about God help them in their trouble?*
- ❓ *What picture does the psalmist conjure up in verses 2-3? What would it feel like to experience this?*

By using images of natural disasters, the psalmist helps us to visualise the terrifying situation the Israelites have found themselves in.

## Know God

### Read Psalm 46:4-7

The scene shifts to Jerusalem, which was vulnerable to attack and besiegement.

- ❓ *What is the contrast between the water of verses 2-3 and the water of verse 4?*
- ❓ *What contrast is made between the mountains and the city of God (v 2, 5)?*
- ❓ *How would this section encourage God's people?*

These verses are like balm on a wound. God's city is completely secure—an oasis of joy and peace in the midst of chaos—because he is dwelling within her.

- ❓ *How does this apply to us? (Hint: read Ephesians 2:19-22.)*

We can claim these verses with confidence because God is within us.

### Read Psalm 46:8-11

- ❓ *What does God do in verses 8-9? What does this teach us about him?*
- ❓ *Who is God addressing in verses 10? Why is it pointless to oppose God?*
- ❓ *Why do you think the psalmist repeats verse 7 in verse 11?*

We might read verse 10 as a gentle encouragement to rest in God's sovereignty—but it's actually a stern command to the nations, calling them to submit themselves to God before it's too late. He is the awesome Lord of history, the one who controls all armies and governments, all bosses and families. And that's why we, as his people, have no need to fear anything at all.

## Apply

### Re-read Psalm 46:1

- ❓ *Why does knowing that God is for you give you peace in trouble?*
- ❓ *How will this psalm help you to turn to God at the first sight of trouble?*