

“Be My Witnesses”

Book of Acts – Week #1

5-View every conversation as a race consultation

James 1:19 NIV - 19 My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,

Instinctively we evaluate people based on visual clues. And we may make assumptions that are simply wrong. When you see people in the news, or meet them in person, are you listening for truth that might challenge your assumptions; are you in a position to learn?

Rather than speaking from our assumptions when we enter a conversation with someone different from us, how can we apply James 1:19?

6- Give your heart to those not like you.

John 15:13 NIV - 13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

Some of us have broken, damaged or hard hearts, but God wants to put His heart in us, so that we can willingly give our hearts to others.

If you believe that your heart needs healing from what you have witnessed in news these past two weeks, take a few moments of silent prayer as you conclude and let the God touch you.

WRAP-UP

God calls us out of our comfort zone to live our lives as a witness of who He is - anointed to bring Good News to the poor, sent to proclaim that captives would be released, that the blind would see, and that the oppressed set free

Memory Verse

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere--in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

- Acts 1:8 NLT

PRAYER (20 MIN)

Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life: _____

Pray for your group members' needs: _____

Challenge: Find someone who is different from you and ask them if you do anything that's offensive to them, and don't become defensive, but receive it and reflect on what they say.

INTRODUCTION

As we begin our study in the book of Acts, we find God's Holy Spirit illuminating for us the relevance of His Word with respect to current events because the church was launched as a multiethnic movement. Jesus was inclusive in extending the Gospel and inviting all people into the kingdom of Heaven. Our faith must be more than merely the study of the bible, or even the offering of our prayers. In the first chapter of Acts Jesus commissioned His followers to be witnesses of Jesus; the One who was anointed to bring Good News to the poor, sent to proclaim that captives would be released, that the blind would see, and that the oppressed set free. (Luke 4:18)

Ice Breaker (Optional—8 min)

Have you had someone of a different color (black/white) in your home, and have you been in the home of someone of another color?

STUDY QUESTIONS (45 MIN)

1. Willing to be Uncomfortable

Acts 1:6-9 NLT - 6 So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, "Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?" 7 He replied, "The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere--in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." 9 After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him.

The disciples' focus was on restoring the kingdom to Israel, but Jesus was focused on bringing the kingdom of Heaven to earth. He was preparing them for a totally different mission than they had in mind. Jesus' final instructions called His followers to be His witnesses, His representatives, using the power provided by God through His Holy Spirit. Jesus told the disciples to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. This is not only a matter of distance; it is also a matter of comfort. The farther they travelled, the more the people they encountered were different from them, and the more uncomfortable it was to be a witness of Jesus.

Luke 4:17-19 NLT - 17 The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written: 18 "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, 19 and that the time of the LORD's favor has come."

What are some practical ways your life can be a witness to Jesus' in each of these areas:

- Good News to the poor,
- release of the captives,
- the blind will see,
- the oppressed will be set free

Do you feel ready to do the difficult work of being a witness to those who are outside your comfort zone?

2. Reuniting Heaven and Earth

God wants to reunite heaven and earth. In Genesis we saw a perfect relationship between God and His creation destroyed by sin. Restoring that relationship is a demonstration of heaven invading earth. When Jesus restores our relationship to God, we become part of the God's family, which includes all believers, regardless of our differences.

The kingdom of this world denies our brotherhood with others through the sin of racism. We caught a glimpse of the pain of racism over the past two weeks. It was a picture of injustice that stands in opposition to God's character. (Ps 89:14) And it should break our hearts as it does God's. Justice isn't other than the gospel, it is the gospel. When we work toward bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth, we work towards justice.

Psalm 89:14 NIV - 14 Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you.

You may have been unaware of the racism that exists around us because you have not experienced it personally, or you have a blind spot that kept you from seeing it. What forms of injustice based on race (racism) have you either experienced or witnessed? Are there any you have only recently been made aware of?

3. How do we overcome division?

Miles McPherson suggested 6 things to overcome division.

1-Acknowledge that you have a blind spot

1 John 1:8 NLT - 8 If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth.

We have an unintentional tendency to group people into "us" and "them" based on our similarities, creating "in" groups and "out" groups.

Which groups are you most comfortable with ("in group")? Can you name some of your uncomfortable "out groups"?

2-Rename "those people" as brother and sister.

1 John 4:21 NIV - 21 And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

God commands us to love one another. But when we label people, they are no longer viewed as our brother or sister, they are one of "those people".

What are some of the labels that allow people to view others as objects of ridicule rather than image bearers of God?

3- Give "in group love" to the "out group"

Matthew 5:44 NIV - 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

We may find ourselves frequently surrounded by those like us. But there will be times when someone shows up who is not like everyone else around- they are the odd man out in your group. Rather than allowing them to feel alienated you can extend God's love to them.

Ask God to open your eyes to see from the perspective of those who are different from your "in group". Not from obligation or guilt, but from God-given empathy reach out to extend brotherly love. Where will you be able to put this into practice?

4- Acknowledge your brother/sister's color

Song of Songs 1:5 NIV - 5 Dark am I, yet lovely, daughters of Jerusalem, dark like the tents of Kedar, like the tent curtains of Solomon

We need not deny a person's color to acknowledge their value. Some people claim to be "color blind" to race, but that denies the contribution of their race that makes that person unique. What racial, national or cultural heritage makes you unique?