

SAMPLE CHAPTER
NOT FOR RESALE

SAVED

EXPERIENCING THE PROMISE OF
THE BOOK OF ACTS



NANCY GUTHRIE

LEADER'S GUIDE



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Saved Leader's Guide

Experiencing the Promise of the Book of Acts

Nancy Guthrie

Saved Leader's Guide: Experiencing the Promise of the Book of Acts

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Contents

Author's Note *vii*

Planning Your Study *i*

Ideas and Resources for Discussion Group Facilitators *9*

PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS WITH POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Introduction: Acts of the Apostles? *9*

- 1 You Will Be My Witnesses (1:1–26) *13*
- 2 I Will Pour Out My Spirit (2:1–47) *36*
- 3 In Jesus the Resurrection from the Dead (3:1–4:31) *00*
- 4 You Will Not Be Able to Overthrow Them (4:32–5:42) *00*
- 5 The Most High Does Not Dwell in Houses Made by Hands
(6:1–7:60) *00*
- 6 They Were All Scattered (8:1–40) *00*
- 7 God's Chosen Instrument (9:1–31) *00*
- 8 What God Has Made Clean (9:32–11:18) *00*
- 9 The Hand of the Lord Was with Them (11:19–12:25) *00*

- 10 All That God Had Done with Them (13:1–14:28) 00
- 11 Saved through the Grace of the Lord Jesus (15:1–16:5) 00
- 12 There Is Another King, Jesus (16:6–17:9) 00
- 13 I Have Many in This City Who Are My People
(17:10–18:23) 00
- 14 The Word Continued to Increase and Prevail Mightily
(18:24–20:38) 00
- 15 Paul Resolved in His Spirit to Go to Jerusalem
(21:1–23:35) 00
- 16 I Always Take Pains to Have a Clear Conscience toward God
and Man (24:1–26:32) 00
- 17 It Will Be Exactly as I Have Been Told (27:1–28:31) 00
- Group Discussion Questions 00

Planning Your Study

AS A LEADER, YOU HAVE THE FREEDOM to choose how to use these resources in a way that will work best for your group. Below we've sought to outline some considerations as you decide on the homework to assign, the length of your study, and how you'll divide up your time together.

How to Structure Your Study

This study can be done with or without the video version of the teaching. The content of the videos is the same as the chapters in the book.

For your first meeting, I suggest that you either have participants read the introduction in the book in advance, read the introduction aloud in your gathering, cover its content in your own words, or watch the introduction video, and then work through the discussion questions provided for the introduction session. You might also use this time to talk about how your time will be structured and clarify expectations. Your participants can then work on the personal Bible study for chapter 1 on their own prior to the next gathering.

If participants are working on the personal Bible study on their own, *we generally do not recommend that you plan to spend your*

time together going over all the personal Bible study questions. These questions are invaluable for laying a foundation of understanding and helping participants immerse themselves in Scripture prior to reading the chapter or watching the video, but they do not always lend themselves very well to group discussion because they often generate simply factual responses.

You will want to use the discussion questions as your primary source for generating thoughtful discussion. These questions are designed to lead you from the text of the Bible and the chapter or video presentation into real life, deepening your understanding of the text and its implications, and making personal applications. Questions from the personal Bible study are occasionally brought into the discussion questions where we think discussing them would be helpful.

Note: If you assign the personal Bible study as homework and have someone in your group who repeatedly does not complete it, you might see if she would be interested in meeting for lunch, coffee, or a study session to work through it together. Perhaps there is an intimidation or frustration factor that you can help with.

Using Your Group Time

Following are just two examples of how you might plan your group time together based on how long you meet, whether you're using the book or the video, and whether you want to work through the personal Bible study individually or as a group. Of course, these examples are not exhaustive, but we hope they will give you ideas as you plan your study in a way that will work best for your group.

If you are using the teaching videos in this series, you will find that they vary slightly but generally last 30–45 minutes.

Example 1: Sixty minutes using book only, with participants reading the chapter in between gatherings:

- 5 minutes: Welcome and prayer.
- 15 minutes: Leader talks through main points of chapter, asking participants to share parts of the chapter that were significant.
- 35 minutes: Work through discussion questions.
- 5 minutes: Prayer of response to material, close.

Example 2: Ninety minutes using video:

- 5 minutes: Welcome, get settled, announcements.
- 35 minutes: Watch video teaching.
- 35 minutes: Discussion using the discussion questions.
- 10 minutes: End with various participants praying in response to what has been presented and discussed. Each session of the discussion questions ends with an invitation to pray through what has been presented in the passage.

Using the Personal Bible Study Questions

Work through questions on your own first. We all know that it can be a challenge to resist looking for the answers to a crossword puzzle in the back of the book. As the leader, it may likewise be a challenge for you to resist using this resource when you work through these questions for the first time. *We strongly urge you to use a blank copy of the personal Bible study and complete the questions on your own first, just like your fellow group members, without reading the possible answers in this leader's guide until after you've completed it on your own.* After working through the questions yourself, you

can look over the leader's guide and add notes to your own answers as desired in preparation for the group discussion.

The possible answers to the personal Bible study questions found in this leader's guide are provided to assist you and other small-group leaders in facilitating discussion and dealing with difficult questions. *This guide should never be provided to group members.* Think of it as a reference tool. If you choose to discuss the answers to the personal Bible study questions when you gather, be sure to avoid referring to what is provided in this leader's guide as the source of the "right" or "best" answer.

The personal Bible study is much less focused on personal application and much more about laying scriptural groundwork. It doesn't tie up loose ends (we hope the book chapter or the video will help to clarify any confusing concepts) and doesn't always make direct application. Its primary purpose is to get participants into God's word to see for themselves what it says and begin thinking about what it means.

Depending on the Bible study experience, maturity level, or personalities of the people in your group, some may tend to get impatient with these "What does this passage say?" questions and want to rush to application: "What does this have to do with my life?" Often in our instant-gratification culture, women want to put in a few minutes of Bible reading and come away with a feel-good bit of encouragement or a clear to-do list. They're seeking a quick "How does this apply to me?" takeaway.

Applying the Bible to our lives is essential! But the appropriate application is not always immediately clear. It's good for us to press in and think deeply to gain clarity about what the text meant to the original audience (them/then) before we bring it into our own context (us/now). If we don't spend much time on

the “So what?” question in the personal Bible study, that doesn’t mean it won’t be addressed at all. Rather, we believe that the application will be deeper and more powerful (and more faithful to the Scriptures) when we get there if we invest the time to think carefully and understand what God’s word says first. Each chapter in the book and each video presentation will present some ideas for application. And much of the discussion guide focuses on getting practical and living out the truths presented. We should keep in mind, however, that the most important impact of the lessons may be less about “what I’m supposed to do” or “how I’m supposed to change” and more about leading us to wonder and worship in light of the magnificence of God’s salvation plan and the generosity of “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21).

*How Long Should It Take to Complete the
Personal Bible Study Questions?*

There is no set time frame. We all approach this differently. Some participants love to linger, think through, look up, and write out. Others simply look for the answers and make short notations. If you’re asked about the time commitment, we suggest you say that it takes as much time as they choose to invest in it. Some lessons include more passages to look up than others, but we would expect that you could read the Scriptures and complete the questions in thirty to sixty minutes. Certainly participants may have more time available some weeks than others, but we all know that we get more out of study the more we put into it. As the leader, keep in mind that the depth of thought given to the lesson is not necessarily reflected in the length of answers written on the page or the time spent according to the clock.

What is most important is not how much time it takes, but that each participant plan a time to work through the personal Bible study and keep that appointment. In fact, on the first week, you might go around the circle and ask each group member to share with the group when she intends to work on the personal Bible study in the coming week. This encourages planning and establishes some accountability, as well as providing ideas to others in the group for when they might make time for study. You might ask those who have done similar studies if they prefer to do it in one sitting or to break it up over several days.

It will be wise for you to affirm at the start why we are doing any of this: because we want to know Christ through his word. This is not like the busywork we did in school. This is the pursuit of relationship with Christ, which comes primarily as we open up God's word to hear him speak to us as we read it, think it through for ourselves, chew on it, discuss it, and pray through it. It is both elements—the personal Bible study and the teaching (either book or video)—that prepare participants to take part in the group discussion.

Using the Group Discussion Questions

You will find a copy of the discussion questions for each session beginning on page 203 of this leader's guide. You may copy and hand out these questions to your group members if you would like, though you don't have to.

The discussion questions don't always lend themselves to simple answers; they invite participants to interact with the themes and challenges of each passage and consider how we are called to live in light of these truths. You will want to spend some time going over the questions on your own prior to your group time. Looking

over the notes we've provided will give you a sense of the types of conversations we're hoping to provoke. But we hope you'll view this guide as a resource, not as a script. You might choose to add an opening question that will help participants warm up, or you might be selective about which questions you think will be most effective with your group and fit in your time frame. You may also want to encourage participants to share something that was meaningful or challenging to them from the personal Bible study, the book chapter, or the video presentation, determining ahead of time at what point in the discussion you will invite those comments.

We strongly urge you not to read answers from this leader's guide, as this creates a "right answer" environment rather than a genuine discussion among equal participants. Instead, we suggest you make some notes from the leader's guide onto your copy of the discussion questions and bring them in where needed, esteeming the input of your group. Their contributions may be different from what we've provided—and even more insightful!

Introduction

Acts of the Apostles?

Personal Bible Study

There is no personal Bible study to be completed prior to the introductory session.

Discussion Questions

1. Some of us may have studied Acts before, while others of us may be completely new to it. When you think about the book of Acts (the largest book of the New Testament), what do you already know—or think you know—about it?

Personal response.

2. As we trace the progress of the gospel in Acts, it will be helpful for us to consult various maps of the known world in the first century. Take a moment to explore your Bible. What map(s) do you find that might prove helpful during this study?

Personal response.

3. Nancy talked about the personal Bible study questions she has prepared to help us to get into the text of Acts. Are you planning to work through the personal Bible study prior to each session? Where can you make time in your schedule for completing it?

Personal response.

4. Nancy presented various possible titles for the book of Acts: Acts of the Apostles, Acts of the Holy Spirit, Acts of the Preached Word, and Acts of the Enthroned Lord Jesus. How are each of these “actors” significant in accomplishing the salvation of God?

The apostles are the vessels through whom God carries out his plan. May we never overlook how incredible it is that God chooses to work through humans—he doesn’t need us, but he grants us the privilege and joy of participating in his work.

The Holy Spirit fills believers, empowering them to proclaim the gospel and perform signs and wonders. The Spirit grants people repentance and draws them to believe in Jesus.

The preached word is the tool the apostles use to draw people to God. It almost seems to take on an identity of its own in Acts, repeatedly described as spreading, increasing, and multiplying.

And through the apostles, the Spirit, and the word, the enthroned Lord Jesus is at work. He is still active from heaven, providing for his disciples and adding believers to his church.

5. The central aim of Acts is to assure us that the Lord Jesus is at work by his Spirit, through the word of God preached and

written by the apostles, to save a vast people for himself. Why might Luke's original audience have needed that assurance? Why might we need that assurance today?

Immediately after Jesus's ascension, it would be natural to wish Jesus were still among you. "How amazing it must have been for those who got to see him and walk with him!" you might think. "Why couldn't he have stayed? Look at all we missed out on!" And two thousand years later, isn't it easy for us to feel the same? It seems like following him would be so much easier if he were physically present with us. But Luke writes to assure them then, as well as us now, that even though Jesus is not visible, he is no less active in our lives and in the world around us. He is in heaven, but he is not far off or disinterested. He loves and cares for us. He is committed to building his church. Knowing that he is with us and at work through us gives us confidence to join him in his work.

6. Salvation is past, present, and future, so we can rightly say, "I have been saved; I am being saved; I will be saved." How does this challenge your thinking about what it means to be "saved"? What are we being saved from in each of these three aspects of salvation?

Initially, at the point of regeneration, our sins are forgiven—entirely and completely. We have been delivered from sin's penalty. Through faith, we are reckoned to be righteous—as righteous as Christ is. Then as we learn to walk with Christ in this life, we are gradually being delivered from sin's power. Ultimately, in heaven, we will be delivered from sin's presence.

INTRODUCTION

We could also call this the three stages of salvation: justification, sanctification, and glorification.

7. What do you personally hope to get out of this study of Acts?

Personal response.

Let's close by praying that God will impress upon us the wonders of his salvation plan for his people as we work our way through this study of Acts.

Lesson 1

You Will Be My Witnesses

ACTS 1:1–26

Personal Bible Study

1. Read Acts 1:1–3, which serves as a summary of what Luke wrote in the Gospel of Luke and what he is going to write in this first chapter of Acts. When you read that Jesus spent forty days “speaking about the kingdom of God” with the apostles, what kinds of things do you think he might have discussed? (You might also want to read Luke 24:44–48, which provides another statement about what Jesus taught the apostles, or use your concordance to find other passages that refer to the kingdom.)

Ever since the beginning of Luke, which we could think of as part 1 of a two-part book (Luke-Acts), Luke has connected Jesus and his kingdom to the promises made to King David. The Lord promised David a son who would sit on his throne and

rule over a kingdom that would last forever (2 Sam. 7:12–16; Luke 1:31–33). So Jesus likely helped the disciples connect all the Old Testament promises of a king and a kingdom of justice and righteousness to himself and his kingdom.

We can infer from the Gospels that Jesus likely spoke to them about the nature of the kingdom, perhaps reminding them of his parables (Luke 13:18–30, for example) and how he showed signs of the kingdom in his miracles (see Matt. 9:35). Perhaps he reminded them of the kingdom values he preached in Luke 6:17–49.

Throughout his ministry on earth, Jesus repeatedly spoke of the many ways his kingdom is not like kingdoms of the world. So perhaps he continued to differentiate his kingdom from worldly kingdoms. Perhaps he reminded them of who could and could not be a part of his kingdom (Luke 6:20; 9:62; 13:29; 18:15–17, 24). He might have reiterated to them how he had taught them to pray, “Your kingdom come” (Luke 11:2), instructing them that they should continue to pray for it to come in all its glorious fullness.

He may have also reminded them of the parable he had told in response to their expectation that “the kingdom of God was to appear immediately” (Luke 19:11–27). This would have encouraged them to steward what he entrusted to them as they awaited his return.

And perhaps he emphasized the “all nations” aspect of the kingdom, helping them see how God’s plan all along was to include the Gentiles. Perhaps he took them to Isaiah 49 to explain that it was “too light a thing” that he as servant of

the Lord should raise up and preserve only the tribes of Jacob but rather that his intent was and is to make them “a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Isa. 49:6).

2. Read Acts 1:4. Jesus tells the disciples to wait for “the promise of the Father.” What do the following verses reveal about this promise?

Isaiah 32:14–15: The Spirit will be poured out on God’s people, transforming them from being like wilderness to a fruitful field.

Isaiah 44:3: The Spirit will be poured out on Israel’s offspring.

Joel 2:28–29: The Spirit will be poured out on all flesh so that all of God’s people will prophesy.

3. Read Acts 1:6–7. The disciples’ question, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” could be understood a number of ways. How would the following passages have shaped the disciples’ expectations of “restoration”?

Isaiah 49:5–6: Restoration means bringing Israel back to God and making them a light to the nations so that his “salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

Ezekiel 37:20–28: The tribes of the northern and southern kingdoms will become one nation in the land again, with one king over them. Idolatry will be a thing of the past. God will dwell with them in a covenant of peace, claiming them as his own and identifying himself as their God. All nations will know that he sanctifies them and is in their midst.

Zechariah 2:10–11: God will welcome Gentiles into the people of God.

4. Read Acts 1:8, which provides a rough outline for the entire book of Acts. Consider who Jesus was speaking to. Why might this statement from Jesus have been challenging for them to grasp?

Jesus spoke these words to twelve Galileans who had likely never traveled widely or interacted much with Gentiles. Their sense was that Jesus was a Messiah for the Jews. It probably never occurred to them that they would testify about Jesus to Gentiles, or that they would go “to the end of the earth.” They probably found it hard to grasp what it would mean for the Holy Spirit to “come upon” them.

5. Read Acts 1:9–11. What details do these verses provide about the ascension and return of Christ?

Jesus, in his human body, was lifted up from the earth. He was enveloped in a cloud. Two men in white robes stood by the disciples and spoke to them. Then men in white robes told them that Jesus was taken up into heaven and that he will return to earth in the same way.

6. Read Acts 3:19–21. What does Peter come to understand about the time of restoration?

The time of full restoration will come when Jesus returns to earth.

7. Read Acts 1:12–20. In verse 16, Peter says that the psalms of David he is quoting (Psalms 69:25 and 109:8) are fulfilled in

Judas. How do you think Peter has been able to come to that conclusion? (See Luke 24:25–27, 44–47.)

Over the forty days Jesus spent with his disciples after his resurrection, he had opened their minds to see how the Old Testament was most profoundly about him—specifically about his suffering and glory. Perhaps in “speaking about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3), Jesus also showed them how to understand David’s psalms as not only speaking about David’s own experience but more profoundly about the experiences of his greater son, King Jesus. So where Psalm 69 speaks of the enemies of God’s king experiencing the curse of desolation, Peter sees Judas, who set himself as an enemy of God in his betrayal of Jesus. And when Peter reads in Psalm 109 that the life of the wicked man who responds to the king’s love with hatred should be cut short and “another take his office,” Peter discerns this to be about the wicked Judas, who responded to Jesus’s love with hatred.

8. Read Acts 1:21–26. What requirements do you find for the replacement apostle according to these verses? (You might also consult Acts 10:39–41.)

An apostle had to have been with Jesus throughout his three years of public ministry. He had to have been an eyewitness of the resurrected Jesus. He had to be chosen by Jesus.

9. The time the apostles spent with Jesus between his resurrection and ascension helped them to grapple with the ways the kingdom of Jesus was not what they had expected it to be. They had to make some adjustments in their understanding and expectations. Has your life, as a citizen of the kingdom

of God, been what you expected it to be? What truths from Jesus's teaching about the kingdom could help you adjust your expectations toward what Jesus has promised?

Personal response.

Discussion Questions

1. Luke begins by referring to his Gospel, which was about what Jesus "began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1). This implies that Acts is about what Jesus *continued* to do and teach after his ascension. Why is it important for us to recognize that Jesus continues to "do and teach" from his throne in heaven?

While Jesus walked on earth, he said, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18)—and even though he is now in heaven, he is indeed building his church. Jesus's ministry was not limited to a few years in first-century Palestine! He actively continues to "do and teach" from his throne in heaven, and his purposes cannot be thwarted or resisted. Nothing and no one can stop his plans from coming to fruition.

We are not building his church, though in his grace he equips and uses us to be a part of his great mission. But it is not up to us. This means we do not need to be anxious in the face of opposition, persecution, or rejection. We never need to think that we are on our own in our mission to proclaim the gospel so that people from every nation will be saved. And we need not grow discouraged when the growth is slow to come. Jesus is on his throne in heaven, ruling over every aspect of God's salvation plan, and it will come about in his way and in his timing.

2. Why is the ascension of Jesus significant? Why do you think we give so much less attention to it than to his incarnation, death, and resurrection?

The ascension of the risen and glorified (and yet still human!) Jesus assures us that Jesus is still active on behalf of his people, ruling and reigning from heaven. It also encourages us to anticipate his bodily return to this earth. In the resurrection, Jesus conquered death; in the ascension, he was exalted to the right hand of the Father. When we focus solely on what he has done for us in the past in his life, death, and resurrection, we fail to realize the implications of his ongoing lordship and what he continues to do for us. We devalue his present ministry to us and for us in heaven.

Perhaps we give less attention to his ascension because we have less of a record of his ministry from heaven than we have of his ministry on earth. But while we don't have a lot of details, the New Testament gives us some powerful examples of what Jesus's ascension to the Father's right hand means for us. In his glorified human body, Jesus has gone to heaven "as a forerunner on our behalf" (Heb. 6:20). As a result of his ascension, we have "a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain" (Heb. 6:19). From his place in heaven, the exalted Lord bestows gifts of repentance and forgiveness of sins (Acts 5:31). And he serves there as our mediator, interceding for us (Rom. 8:34).

3. What kinds of things do you think Jesus discussed with the apostles when he spent forty days with them "speaking about the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3)?

Jesus likely taught his disciples how he is the King at the center of the kingdom. Luke 24:44–48 tells us that he helped them see how all of the Old Testament points to him, how the prophecies have been or will be fulfilled in him—that he is God’s “yes” to all those promises (2 Cor. 1:20). He may have clarified for them why the cross was necessary, and how it was not the end but the beginning. He also probably emphasized the “all nations” aspect of the kingdom, helping them see how God’s plan all along was to include the Gentiles. Perhaps he took them to Isaiah 49 to explain that it was “too light a thing” that he as servant of the Lord should raise up and preserve only the tribes of Jacob, but rather that his intent was and is to make them “a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Isa. 49:6).

4. How would the Old Testament prophets have shaped how the apostles thought about the restoration of Israel?

The prophets repeatedly spoke of a day when the twelve tribes of Israel, who were separated when the northern kingdom split from the southern kingdom, would be regathered and restored to God and to each other. A regathered and restored Israel would be a beacon of light beckoning the nations to stream to Mount Zion to worship the one true God (Isa. 11; 60; Ezek. 37:16–19).

From Isaiah 49:5–6, they could have understood that restoration would mean that Israel was brought back into loving relationship with God and that he would make them a light to the nations so that his “salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

From Ezekiel 37:20–28, they could have understood restoration coming as the tribes of the northern and southern kingdoms became one nation in the land again, with one king over them. Idolatry would be a thing of the past. God would dwell with them in a covenant of peace, claiming them as his own and identifying himself as their God.

From Zechariah 2:10–11, they could have understood that restoration would include God welcoming Gentiles into the people of God.

5. If you were an ordinary Israelite in the Old Testament era, why might you have longed for the day when “the promise of the Father,” the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in all believers, would become a reality?

We likely take the Holy Spirit’s indwelling of every believer for granted. We’ve never had to live as those who loved God and sought to obey his commands but did not have the Holy Spirit within them. The prophets had promised that the day would come when the Spirit would be poured out, cleansing them of idolatry and giving them a new heart for obedience (Isa. 44:3–4; Ezek. 36:25–28; Joel 2:28–29). Israelites under the old covenant must have longed for the power of the Holy Spirit to give them the “want-to” to obey God’s commands. They must have longed to have the Spirit work in their minds to guide them into truth. They must have longed for the Spirit to comfort them with assurance of salvation. They must have longed for the conviction of the Holy Spirit that would prompt them to confess and forsake sin.

The Spirit's work in all believers would form them into a true community, empowering them to love and serve each other and the world around them. Surely the Old Testament Israelites who so often succumbed to idolatry, apathy toward God, and conflict with each other would have longed for the Spirit to be at work among them to enliven their fellowship with God and strengthen their community life.

6. Jesus tells the apostles that they would receive power to be his witnesses “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). In what ways would they need divine power to accomplish this task?

To be effective witnesses, the apostles would first need to understand and remember all that Jesus had taught them. This is exactly what Jesus had promised in John 14:26 that the Spirit would do for them. Additionally, these men had just recently fled in fear when Jesus was arrested and crucified. Clearly they would need supernatural power to stand firm and speak boldly in the face of persecution and opposition. They would also need divine power to overcome their natural prejudice against non-Jews.

7. Can the statement “You will be my witnesses” be applied directly to us today? Why or why not?

It does apply to us today, but only derivatively, as we hold fast to the apostles' foundational gospel witness and build on that apostolic foundation (Eph. 2:20). Our calling is to proclaim what they have recorded for us in the New Testament. It is also important to recognize that, for most of us, our home base for

missionary activity is not Jerusalem. Instead, we are part of “the end of the earth” reached by the gospel in the period beyond its foundational spread.

8. Nancy suggests that instead of thinking of ourselves as “witnesses,” we should think of ourselves as “proclaimers.” What is the difference? How might this distinction impact how we approach our mission?

We can never be “witnesses” to Christ in the sense that the apostles were, as eyewitnesses to the resurrected Christ. And our calling isn’t really to give a testimony about our own experience. That can often be a valuable part of our conversations about Christ, but it is not the focus of our message. Our calling is to proclaim the objective truth that the apostolic witnesses have recorded for us in the Gospels and Epistles about the Lord Jesus Christ. This should shape (and perhaps constrain) the content of our message. If our message is not drawn from, or does not conform faithfully to, what the apostles have recorded for us, we are not doing true gospel ministry.

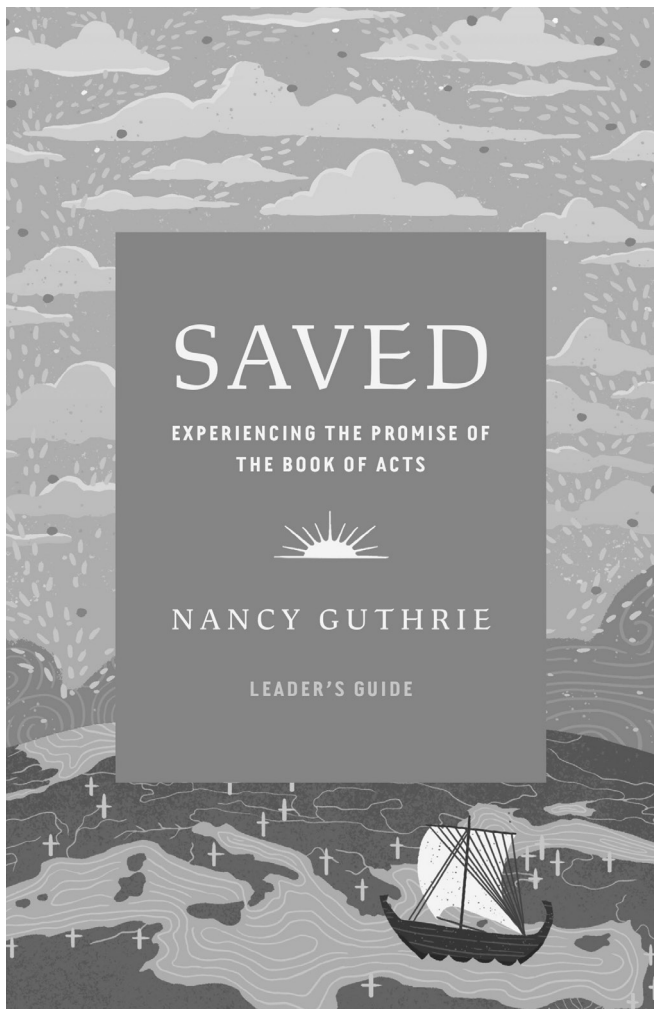
9. Though we are proclaimers rather than witnesses, we need the same divine power these eyewitnesses needed to accomplish their task. And that power is available to us! In what ways do we need the Holy Spirit’s power to accomplish our task?

We need the Spirit to enlighten the eyes of our hearts (Eph. 1:18) so that we understand the word that testifies to him. We need him to convict us of sin and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9) so that we have integrity as we proclaim truth. We need his power to communicate clearly and boldly.

YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES

We need him to give us courage in the face of opposition and wisdom to guide our steps.

Let's close by praying for each other to receive divine power for the task of proclaiming what the apostles have handed down to us.



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NANCY GUTHRIE teaches the Bible at her home church, Cornerstone Presbyterian Church in Franklin, Tennessee, as well as at conferences around the country and internationally, including her Biblical Theology Workshop for Women. She is the author of numerous books and the host of the *Help Me Teach the Bible* podcast with the Gospel Coalition.

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