

# A DEVOTIONAL

*For The Time of Lent*

# ACTS

with Water to Thrive



WRITTEN BY

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EDITED BY

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# INTRODUCTION



This study of Acts and how it relates to Water To Thrive's (W2T) ministry has been written for those who are interested in W2T's mission. Their mission statement can be found at [watertothrive.org](http://watertothrive.org) and is as follows:

*Water to Thrive transforms lives in rural Africa by working with partners and beneficiaries to bring the blessing of clean, safe water, connecting communities in need with supporters who have the heart and spirit to make a difference.*

Having been an American Lutheran Church missionary to Ethiopia from 1960 to 1964, and having traveled to that country many times with W2T and earlier; with the foundation I developed, called the Ethiopian Development Project, I am directing most of the examples and lessons in this devotional to that mission experience.

The choice of Acts as the Biblical reference for this study reflects the actions, or "acts" we all do because of the Grace given freely to us through the life and death of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Acts tells us of the time after Jesus' death and resurrection, about what the church as groups of believers experienced. At the writing of Acts, the Temple has now been destroyed, and persecution of these believers has begun.

As to the author of Acts, we turn to Bible Study Tools:

"Although the author does not name himself [sic], evidence outside the Scriptures and inferences from the book itself lead to the conclusion that the author was Luke.

The earliest of the external testimonies appears in the Muratorian Canon (c.a.d. 170), where the explicit statement is made that Luke was the author of both the third Gospel and the 'Acts of All the Apostles'. Eusebius (c. 325) lists information from numerous sources to identify the author of these books as Luke (Ecclesiastical History, 3.4).

Two dates are possible for the writing of this book: (1) c.a.d. 63, soon after the last event recorded in the book, and (2) c. 70 or even later.

The recipient of the book, Theophilus, is the same person addressed in the first volume, the Gospel of Luke.

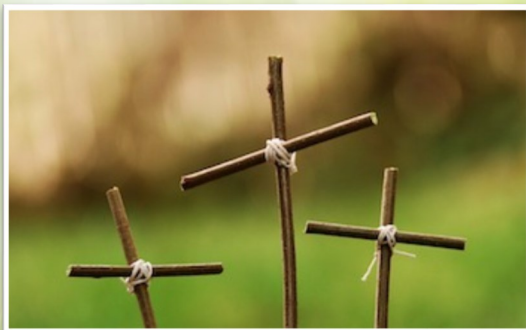
The book of Acts provides a bridge for the writings of the New Testament. As a second volume to Luke's Gospel, it joins what Jesus "began to do and to teach" as told in the Gospels with what he continued to do and teach through the apostles' preaching and the establishment of the church."

# Suggestions for Group Study



Group Leaders: Some suggestions for having a good Bible Study might include the following:

- 1) Have people commit to doing the study by sign-ups, or agreeing to following through at the first gathering.
- 2) When you have the number down, always have the same number of chairs, preferably in a circle, set up. Even when you know someone will be absent, have the chair there to remind all that the person is absent. This will help with cohesion, a goal for groups.
- 3) Some kind of “treat” always helps. A pot of coffee, cookies, relishes, etc. make members want to return.
- 4) Assure all have a say. Having persons volunteer to read sections helps. But, avoid pressuring someone who does not want to read. Don’t embarrass anyone. Always asking for input during the discussion time is helpful. Avoid doing all of the talking; in fact, the leader should speak seldom.
- 5) Encourage members to read the section of Acts prior to getting to the study time.
- 6) Do not avoid talking about tender subjects; just keep the discussion aimed at the goal, which is peace and understanding.
- 7) Laugh and have fun with it.



# Session 1. Acts Chapters 1 - 4



## **Acts 2: 1-4, 12-13**

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

Addis Ababa is the capital and biggest city of Ethiopia. It consists of a population of 4,794,000 with yearly growth rate of 4.4% (retrieved from internet on 2-17-2020). There are more than 120 international missions and embassies in Addis Ababa, making the city a hub for international diplomacy concerning Africa. The headquarters of the African Union and the UN Economic Commission for Africa are both in the city.

There are 90 individual languages in Ethiopia, with Amharic spoken the most frequently. Today, 77 languages are still spoken throughout Ethiopia. When I was a missionary in Ethiopia (1960-1964), Haile Selassie was the Emperor, and he was attempting to get all to speak his language—Amharic. But, when the derg was defeated in 1991, individual regions were given the opportunity to select their own language. Amharic is still known by many of the older persons in the country. But, if all 77 languages were represented at one meeting, there might be a sound as cacophonous as when the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost.

How interesting that at Pentecost, there were those who thought the Spirit-Filled were just drunk! There are still those who try to redirect us away from Holy Spirit encounters. But, trusting in our faith, we can prevail.

## **DISCUSSION**

What Holy Spirit incidences might you have experienced? Are you aware of the Holy Spirit's presence in your daily life? Who were those who doubted the Holy Spirit's presence on the day of Pentecost? What are your thoughts about what you might encounter in this study of the Acts of The Apostles?

## **PRAYER**

**LEADER:** *Spirit of life*

**ALL:** *Fill our emptiness with your fullness.*

**LEADER:** *Spirit of power*

**ALL:** *Stir our hearts afresh.*

**LEADER:** *Spirit of love*

**ALL:** *Touch us, and through us, our neighbor.*

**LEADER:** *Spirit of creativity*

**ALL:** *Enable and empower the gifts you have given.*

**LEADER:** *Spirit of eternity*

**ALL:** *Draw us ever deeper into your Kingdom.*

**Amen.**



## Session 2. Acts Chapters 5 - 8



### *Acts 8: 35-36*

Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him (Ethiopian Eunuch) the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?”

It is most likely that the water to which the eunuch referred was the Blue Nile. We might think about how much of Ethiopian soil has been washed down to the delta in Egypt. The Ethiopian government is in the process of building a dam which would divert much of that water to their own farm lands, and for power.

From: <http://www.circleofblue.org/2018/hotspots/hotspots-h2o-march-5-spotlight-grand-ethiopian-renaissance-dam/>, I found:

“Ethiopia is building a mega-dam along the Nile River, and the ambitious project is straining relations with downstream Egypt. Construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam began in 2011. The \$4 billion dam is now two-thirds complete. Upon completion, it will be the largest dam in Africa, towering over 500 feet tall and generating more than 6,000 megawatts of energy. Ethiopia says the dam will build industry and bring electricity to millions. Egypt, however, fears that Ethiopia could use the dam to control the Nile’s flow. Although hydroelectric power stations do not consume water, the speed with which Ethiopia fills the dam will alter the flow downstream. Egypt is critically reliant on the Nile which provides more than three-quarters of the country’s water.”

On a larger viewpoint, about 70 percent of the Earth's surface is water-covered, and the oceans hold about 96.5 percent of all the Earth's water. Almost 69% of the fresh water on Earth is ice. So, protecting the rest of the available water is absolutely necessary.

### ✻ DISCUSSION ✻

What have you done to protect the water we have? What can we expect in the future regarding water conservation? Can the church affect the use and preservation of clean, potable water for the world?

### ✻ PRAYER ✻

*We praise and thank You, Lord,  
for the gift of living water.  
Guide us  
to use it wisely,  
learn from its humility,  
consume it sparingly,  
and protect its purity,  
so that we may truly enjoy water.  
Amen.  
(by Br. Cathal Duddy)*

## Session 3. Acts Chapters 9 - 12



### Acts 9: 17-19

So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Emperor Fasilides founded the city of Gondar in Ethiopia as his capital. He was a member of the Solomonic dynasty, and lived in the 17th century. Gondar is filled with rich historical sites. The one I favor is King Fasilides' Bath. Timkat means epiphany in Amharic, and every year, on that holiday, Ethiopian Christians commemorate Jesus' baptism by going to the bath area. The celebration starts on the eve of Timkat, when Gondar's top eight priests transport cloaked tabots -- replicas of the Arc of the Covenant -- atop their heads to the baths in an elaborate procession through town, complete with lively song, dance and prayer. Upon arrival at the bath, which is 50 m X 30 m and 2.5 m deep, in the center of which stands the two-storied square castle, many of the celebrants jump into the pool. It has been flooded for the celebration by diverting a river.

As we explore further into Acts, we are reminded of our own baptism. Thank God for the transformation that comes through baptism. Saul was a murderer and persecutor of Christians, and God transformed him through grace on the road and with Ananias' baptism.

### DISCUSSION

Recall your own baptism. Can you think of times when that transformation has been realized in your own experiences? Can we forgive as readily as Ananias, who first doubted Saul's transformation?

### PRAYER

*Gracious God, thank You for Your patience with us when we question You. We want to be an Ananias to a Paul or a Paul to a Macedonia, yet we falter, hesitate, fear, or let our selfish interests rule. Paul saw You and the next thing he saw was You in Ananias. What a key link we can be if we'll trust and obey You! Save us from our own lack of faith. Help us be obedient to You for the sake of others. Let Your Grace flow freely through us into their lives as we live up to our name of Christian - "little Christs". In the Name of Jesus, Whose Life, Death, and intercession proves the Lord has been gracious!  
Amen.  
(by Robin Noland)*

## Session 4. Acts Chapters 13 - 16



### *Acts 16: 13b-16*

We remained in this city (Philippi) for some days. On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us.

Interesting to me are a couple of points in this part of Acts. The first is the conversion of Lydia. She is stated to have been a "dealer in purple cloth." Lydia was most likely a Greek Macedonian even though she lived in a Roman settlement. She was evidently a well-to-do agent of a purple-dye firm in Thyatira. Lydia insisted on giving hospitality to Apostle Paul and his companions in Philippi. They stayed with her until their departure.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy were traveling through the region of Philippi when they encountered a reputable businesswoman and possibly a widow... [who] was a righteous Gentile or 'God-fearer' attracted to Judaism.

Because these encounters and events take place "in what is now Europe," Lydia is considered "the first 'European' Christian convert".

Regarding the purple cloth, Thyatira in the province of Lydia (located in what is now western Turkey) was famous for the red [variety of purple] dye. Lydia of Thyatira is most known as a "seller" or merchant of purple cloth, which is the likely reason for the Catholic Church naming her "patroness of dyers."

Because women did not possess the same equality rights as modern women, it appears unusual that Lydia would be capable of inviting a group of foreign men to her house without a man's consent. The fact that there is no mention of a man has been used to deduce that she was a widow, but this has been challenged as a patriarchal interpretation. Lydia's evident social power exemplified by her control of a household and ownership of a house (which she offered to Paul and his companions) indicates that she was most likely a free woman and possibly a widow.





## Session 4. Acts Chapters 13 - 16



*Acts 16: 13b-16*

*Continued....*

Regarding the purple cloth, I found that the dye is a secretion produced by several species of predatory sea snails, rock snails originally known by the name *Murex*. In ancient times, extracting this dye involved tens of thousands of snails and substantial labor, and as a result, the dye was highly valued. The expense meant that purple-dyed textiles became status symbols, and early sumptuary laws restricted their use. These snails are now virtually extinct.

### DISCUSSION

What instances of hospitality have you encountered; either hosting, or being hosted? How did these experiences influenced your faith? Because these snails were precious to humans, they are, or nearly are, extinct. Discuss endangered species in these times--what does this knowledge have to do with Christian stewardship?

### PRAYER

*Lord, give us the eyes of Jesus to see our neighbors  
and the strangers we meet. Teach us what it means  
to love the stranger as we love ourselves. Forgive  
us for our selfishness, for our silence, for not caring  
enough for the strangers who come to our  
communities. Teach us to love and care for the  
stranger the way you do.*

*Amen.*

(Taken from TCDSB website:  
Rebeca Jiménez Yoder, 5-12-18)





## Session 5. Acts Chapters 17 - 19



### Acts 20: 18-24

When they arrived, he said to them: “You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. “And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.

I chose this part of Acts for this section in order to discuss some of the challenges W2T has had in its African ministry. Those of us involved with W2T have found the challenges not so much with getting the funds for water, but with the actual “digging” the wells. The greatest challenges seem often to come from our ignorance of the presence of cultural and logistic differences in those we serve. “African time” is unlike our “American time.” As Americans, we tend to schedule things, and expect those things to happen like we have planned. Not so with; well, let’s just dwell on Ethiopians as examples. Ethiopians will find it much more likely to “host” us when we go to their villages to build or inspect the wells. They meet us with singing, they shower us with popcorn, they invite us to their homes or in the shade of some majestic trees, and they feed us! Then, we might get around to doing business.

Thinking like Americans, we expected the Non-governmental agencies (NGOs) to work all year! Well, forget that. During the two rainy seasons in Ethiopia, no one travels the dirt roads to the well sites!

### DISCUSSION

Consider raising funds within your church family. Who has done it? What has been the reaction of the members? Discuss your experiences with cultures other than your church family. How did it go? Did the experiences alter your opinions about the people of that culture? Paul says that he expects prison and hardships when he goes to Jerusalem. What fears and beliefs keep you from going to those who are somewhat different from yourself?

### PRAYER

*“God, please surround me with people who understand the pain of anxiety. Provide a community of people who can uplift and encourage, reminding me of truth when I need to be reminded. I ask for people who are gentle and kind, yet bold and honest. You created us to live in authentic community. Lord, give me courage to be vulnerable with those I can trust.*

*In Jesus Name, Amen.”*

(<http://alisonmeyer.com/prayers-for-anxiety/>)

## Session 6. Acts Chapters 21 - 24



### Acts 22: 17-21

‘Hurry and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.’ And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. And while the blood of your witness Stephen was shed, I myself was standing by, approving and keeping the coats of those who killed him.’ Then he said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” ( Mat 23:37). As true as it was in that day, it seems to be true today! Jerusalem has history recorded throughout time. I recall how happy I was as a young boy when Jews were returning to Jerusalem/Israel back in 1948. I was 12-years-old, and David Ben Gurion was a hero in my mind. The Jews have gotten the blame for Jesus’ death, and it is a false news item! It was the Pharisees and Sadducees who participated in that deed. The “regular Jews” did not knowingly participate in the death of Jesus. And now, who is leading the Jewish people?

When we were in Ethiopia in the 1960s we stopped at a “special” spot in Axum. It was a hole dug in the ground. The hole was surrounded by large rocks to protect it from caving in. We did not venture into it, being afraid of snakes, but we were told that the “tunnel” went all the way to Jerusalem! My adopted Ethiopian son said, when we asked him if it was true, “Well, it must be. Because any who entered there never came back!”

### DISCUSSION

Is there a “Jerusalem” in your area? Do some groups of people seem to continually reject change? Reject learning and doing the Word? Paul was willing to stay, even if it meant he died there. Have you considered doing something in the name of Jesus that has placed you in harm’s way? What about the Israeli situation of today? Do you believe it is the “Promised Land” and that it will be the place that Jesus returns? Has Jesus already returned in your life?

### PRAYER

*Enable this church to do your will. Make it vulnerable  
that it may speak with calm humility. Make it  
outward looking that it may care deeply. Make it a  
community of peace-makers and bridge builders. In the  
midst of turbulence let the church make space for the  
hearing of your still small voice.*

*Amen.*

**(Delia, a member of St. Mark’s church)**

## Session 7. Acts Chapters 25 - 28



### Acts 28: 7-10

There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and showed us generous hospitality for three days. His father was sick in bed, suffering from a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. When this had happened, the rest of their sick on the island came and were cured. They honored us in many ways; and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed.

These things happened on the island of Malta, just after Paul, and all the other people from the boat in which they had experienced a horrible storm, landed on this shore. I am attracted to the hospitality shown these ship-wrecked travelers.

One just does not go into an Ethiopian home without being served. There is always some injera, even if your host is poor. But, the coffee ceremony really makes one feel welcome. There is purpose to each step of that ceremony. New grass and flowers are placed on the floor around the coffee pot. After the raw coffee beans are roasted over a charcoal fire, the server makes sure each person in the room gets a good whiff of the smoke. She will then grind the beans. One time in 1997, only a couple of years after the Marxist government had been thwarted, which took 17 years, I visited a farm family by Mekele. As I sat on a small stool which rested on the dirt floor of their home, I saw the hostess take the burned-out shell of a bomb, and a steel rod, and like a mortar and pestle, she pounded those beans to small pieces. As she then put the grounds into the cooking pot, she also started some incense to burn. The aroma of the incense and coffee was exhilarating. She then served the coffee in small cups, while we talked of peace and prosperity of crops. The same grounds are boiled two more times. I thought about the following verses:

*“And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” (Isaiah 2:3-4, King James Version)*

### DISCUSSION

Consider your church's gatherings around coffee. What is the purpose of these gatherings? What do you get for yourself from such gatherings? How do you achieve peace? Within your family? Within your church family? Within your community? What causes war?



## Session 7. Acts Chapters 25 - 28



*Acts 28: 7-10*

*Continued....*

### PRAYER

*Oh Lord, sometimes my insides feel like a battle zone, where missiles are falling too close to home. Other times I'm caught in an endless storm, with thoughts flying out of control. Confusion reigns, and defeat creeps in to steal my joy. I need your peace — the deep-down-in-your-heart kind that stays with me day and night and speaks confidently into the wind. Calm my anxious spirit, Lord; all the attacking "if-onlys" and "what-ifs" fill me with needless worry.*

*I know that trust is a big part of experiencing peace and that fear has no place in my life. Most of the things I worry about or dread don't even happen. So I'm declaring my trust in you. I'm releasing the reins of my life again and asking you to take control. I may need to pray this same prayer daily, but I'm tired of the frenzy of life that leaves my schedule and my thoughts without any margin. I need more of you, Lord, and less of me.*

*I surrender and admit: I can't control people, plans, or even all my circumstances, but I can yield those things to you, and focus on your goodness. Thank you today for every good gift you've given, every blessing you've sent, all the forgiveness I did not deserve, and, yes, for every trial you've allowed into my life. You bring good out of every circumstance if I'll only let go and believe you. I know that when I pray and give thanks instead of worrying, you have promised that I can experience the kind of peace that passes all understanding. That's your kind of peace, Lord. And it's the kind I crave.*

*Whenever I'm stressed, anxious, or afraid, help me remember to run to you. You're the only one that can calm my fears and end my fretful behavior. Whether in trivial or heavy matters, I know you will not only give me peace; Lord, you will be my peace. And when I draw close to you — in prayer, in reading your Word, in helping another, in taking my mind off myself — you will be there, up close and personal.*

*I can't handle these times alone, Lord. Will you speak peace and calm my storms, or hold my hand while we walk through them together? Will you bring the reassuring wisdom of those who have come through similar times into my life? Thank you, Lord. I'm trusting you.*

*In the name of the One who makes the wind and the waves stand still, Amen.*



# END NOTES



This Lenten (or another time) Study is meant to assist groups consider “acts” the church is doing, or might be doing. By looking at the Acts of The Apostles, I have tried to enable groups to achieve peace in a world that seems always at war and near-war. I fear we have become constantly afraid that we will find ourselves involved in “wars” too close to us. How to maintain a peace that overcomes all unwanted strife, may be what we want to achieve.

It will be helpful to the W2T staff and board of directors if the group leader would send an evaluation of how the study went and participants’ reactions to it, to: [susanne@watertothrive.org](mailto:susanne@watertothrive.org).

*Jim Sorensen*



[illegible]

# Pray Out Loud

I Am Grateful For...

## I Am Grateful For...

## Notes





Water to Thrive's first water project was funded in 2008, after a Bible study group at Triumphant Love Lutheran Church in Austin, Texas, learned about the staggering cost of the global water crisis and decided it was necessary to act. The group decided to see if they could raise enough money to fund a couple of wells. After just 90 days, they had ultimately collected enough money to build 12 wells. Dick Moeller, a member of the group, was inspired by the success of that first campaign. He realized that if one church group could raise enough money for 12 wells, others could do even more. Motivated by the desire to bring clean water to those who so desperately need it, Dick founded Water to Thrive.

In the decade since its founding, Water to Thrive has funded more than 1,070 water projects that bring clean, safe water to more than 575,000 people in rural African communities.



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