

Bible Study Leaders Notes – “Imagine” Series

An important note to the leader:

These studies have been written with the direct purpose of assisting the small group leader’s preparation. It may also be useful for the members of your group to have a copy of the studies as well, so they may study the text more fully in their own private devotional time. But, not all of the questions that are printed for each study are necessary to use in your actual small group time.

It is ideal for the small group leader to spend some time in preparation – reading the Bible passage and the specific questions provided – prior to the time when your group meets. You will notice that in some of the studies there are quite a number of “thought and application” questions. This is deliberate. We thought that, rather than have too few, we ought to provide many questions in this section, so that the leader may choose the most appropriate discussions for their particular group.

We suggest that you, briefly, work through all of the “observation and interpretation” section in each study before then going on to raise the “thought and application” questions that you will have chosen for your group.

We hope and pray that you will enjoy the studies and that God will bless you and your group through them.

Introduction to the book of Acts:

On the very first occasion when someone stood up in public to tell people about Jesus, he made it very clear that the message is for all people.

That was a great day – sometimes called the birthday of the Christian church. The great wind of God’s spirit had swept through Jesus’ followers and filled them with a new joy and a sense of God’s presence and power. Their leader, Peter, who only a few weeks before had been crying like a baby because he’d lied and cursed and denied even knowing Jesus, found himself on his feet explaining to a huge crowd that something had happened which had changed the world forever. What God had done to him, Peter, he was beginning to do for the whole world: new life, forgiveness, new hope and power were opening up like spring flowers after a long winter. A new age had begun in which the living God was going to do new things in the world – beginning then and there with the individuals who were listening to him. ‘ This promise is for *you*’, he said, ‘ and for your children, and for every one who is far away’ (Acts2:39). It wasn’t just for the person standing next to you. It was for everyone. Within a remarkably short time this came true to such an extent that the young movement spread throughout much of the known world.

The book of Acts is full of the energy and excitement of the early Christians as they found God doing new things all over the place and learned to take the good news of Jesus around the world. It’s also full of the puzzles and problems that churches faced then and face today – crises over leadership, money, ethnic divisions, theology and ethics, not to mention serious clashes with political and religious authorities. It’s comforting to know that ‘normal church life’, even in the time of the first Apostles, was neither trouble-free nor plain-sailing just as it’s encouraging to know that even in the midst of all their difficulties the early church was able to take the gospel forward in such dynamic ways. Actually, this is the book where more journeys take place, including several across the sea, than anywhere else in the Bible – with the last journey, taking the great apostle Paul to the very centre of the civilized world at that time – Rome.

There isn’t a boring page in Acts. But, equally importantly, the whole book reminds us that whatever journey we are making, in our own lives, our spirituality, our following of Jesus, and our work for his kingdom, his Spirit will guide us too, and make us fruitful in his service. This is a worthwhile book for us to be studying at St Matthew’s at this time. Let’s pray that God will give all of us joy and blessing in doing so.



Vision Acts 11:19-30

Opening discussion

A friend from overseas asks you about Manly. How would you describe the culture of Manly in terms of its people, past-times and priorities? How much diversity exists in these areas?

Section 1: Observation and Interpretation

(Allow 1/3 of your discussion time for this section)

(Take the time to read Acts 11:19-30 and answer the following questions together)

1. What types of people are being converted to the Lord?
Just make a brief scan of Acts 10, the chapter just prior. What's similar about tonight's passage and the events involving Cornelius in Acts 10?
2. Why, do you think, the church in Jerusalem sent a representative to Antioch?
3. What makes Barnabas, in particular, such a good person to send?
4. What makes it fitting in the circumstances for Barnabas to have gone seeking for Paul?
5. In this passage, how do you see the true meaning of Christian being more fully discovered and lived out through love and cultural adaptation?
6. How does this newly named, Christian church respond to the cry of the poor?
What indication is there of the priority they give to this need?

Section 2: Thought and Application

(allow 2/3 of your discussion time for this section)

1. This is not the first time Barnabas has appeared in 'Acts'. Take a moment to skim over the following verses to see what type of person he is: 4:36-37; 9:26-28; 11:22-26; 12:25. Share with your group how Barnabas' example challenges your attitude and lifestyle.
2. Up to this point in the book of Acts, the Risen Lord Jesus, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, has been powerfully committed to saving all peoples. This passage again furthers that commitment. How do you show that you share this desire? How can we as a home-group encourage each other to share Jesus' priorities?
3. How do you think our own care for new believers (you as an individual, and we as a church) compare with the care given here?
4. In what ways do you see our church resisting people-diversity and cultural adaptation? In what ways do you see our church embracing people-diversity and cultural adaptation?
5. What steps could you take to develop godly and encouraging (Barnabas-like) relationships with people who are different from you and your friends? What steps could you take to help St. Matt's become sensitive to cultural changes, and to adapt the church's ministry approach to meet them?
6. How important is it that a Christian church be identified by its response to the poor and needy? How does our church prioritize this type of ministry?
7. In the face of change, how do you handle the need for a new perspective? How do you handle resistance? excitement? uncertainty? fear? In what areas of your own life and the church community do you face change now? How are you responding to this change?



The Gospel

Acts 2:14-41

Opening discussion

What is the gospel? Explain the impact of the gospel in your own life.
(just 1 or 2 people from the group)

Section 1: Observation and Interpretation

(Allow 1/3 of your discussion time for this section)

(Take the time to read Acts 2:14-41 and answer the following questions together)

1. According to verse 17, the filling of the Apostles with the Holy Spirit reflects that the "last days" have now commenced. According to verse 20, what do these last days precede?
2. The "day of the Lord" is a reference to the final judgment when God will punish all sin. What is necessary to do during these last days preceding the "day of the Lord" (v.21)?

(Read Acts 2:22-36 and answer the following questions together)

3. According to verses 22-24, what did men do to Jesus?
What did God do?
4. According to verse 27, what did the Old Testament predict about God's coming King?
What does all this (including your answer to question 3) tell us about Jesus?
5. According to verse 33, where is Jesus now, and what has he done?
6. According to verse 34, what else did the Old Testament predict about God's coming King?
What does this tell us about Jesus?

7. Peter has been drawing some parallels between Jesus, and the Christ predicted in the Old Testament. Verse 36 now comes as Peter's punchline. Try putting that verse in your own words.

(Read Acts 2:37-41 and answer the following questions together)

8. How would you describe the crowd's reaction?
9. What does Peter say they should do, and why?

Section 2: Thought and Application

(allow 2/3 of your discussion time for this section)

1. In what ways are we different from the apostles?
In what ways are we similar?
2. In what ways are we different from the crowds listening to Peter's address in this passage?
In what ways are we similar?
3. Is there any one truth about the risen Christ that has especially struck you from this study?
How should it shape the way you live?
4. What reassurance in Peter's message is most important to you as you consider being Jesus' witness?
5. How is 'salvation'/rescue experienced in your life, and the life of St. Matt's, as a present day reality as well as a future hope?
6. How have your life and ministry and the life and ministry of our church been affected by the gift of the Holy Spirit?
7. How does our church community need to change in order to experience the power of the Holy Spirit and to become a more effective witness?



Community Acts 2:42-47

Opening discussion

- What different communities are you a part of?
- What defines a community to you?

Section 1: Observation and Interpretation

(Allow 1/3 of your discussion time for this section)

(Take the time to read Acts 2:42-47 and answer the following questions together)

1. According to verse 42, describe the fellowship and the priorities of the believers in this young church.
2. According to verse 43, what was the result of such fellowship and priorities?
3. According to verses 44 and 45, in what direction does this shared life develop?
4. According to verses 46 and 47, what effect has their community life had on them. And what effect has their community life had on those around them?

Section 2: Thought and Application

(allow 2/3 of your discussion time for this section)

1. Acts 2:42 has commonly been described as 'the four marks of the church'. . Discuss the importance of each of the 'marks', individually: Teaching; Fellowship; Breaking bread; Prayer.
2. Which of these 'marks' could be removed from Christian fellowship and it still remain 'church'? Are they all necessary? Is there some order of importance?
3. How fascinating, and how controversial, do you find the practice of the early church of owning everything in common?
4. How does this practice parallel the practice of a regular family home?
5. How is our commitment to God and his people expressed in our attitude to 'our own' money and things?
Discuss the difference between genuine love and patronizing legalism in practicing generosity.
6. How do you see our Christian community at St Matt's behaving like a family?
What steps could be made to improve in this area – in your own life and attitude?
And, in the life and attitude of the church?
7. What do you think it would be like for the Lord to add daily to the numbers of our Christian community at St Matt's, those who are being saved?
8. How do the things we've learned in this passage help us to become an attractive church?



Prayer and Worship Acts 12:1-25

Opening discussion

What is your experience of prayer? Share an example of prayer in your experience that has been answered with: a) Yes, b) No, or c) Wait.

Section 1: Observation and Interpretation

(Allow 1/3 of your discussion time for this section)

(Take the time to read Acts 12:1-19 and answer the following questions together)

1. How do the details of Peter's imprisonment (12:4, 6) make his escape all the more dramatic?
2. What does the church's response to James's death and Peter's being in prison (vv.5 and 12) demonstrate about prayer?
3. If the believers were praying for Peter (v.5), why were they so surprised when he escaped?

(Read Acts 12:20-25 and answer the following questions together)

4. Compare the attitude of Herod (v.21-23) with that of Peter (10:25-26).
5. Which King is victorious, Herod or the risen Christ? (It's not rocket science)

Section 2: Thought and Application

(allow 2/3 of your discussion time for this section)

1. Like Herod, can you think of a time when you have acted wrongly for the sake of pleasing someone, or to fit in somewhere. What were the consequences of your actions?
2. How quickly and persistently do you and our Christian community resort to prayer?
3. James was killed as a result of persecution (v.7), while Peter was rescued from death by God – how does God's providence and promises relate to this seeming inequality?
4. When are you tempted, and when are we tempted as a church, to respond like those who told Rhoda, "You're out of your mind" (v.15)?
5. Why should the mystery of God's providence and the unstoppable power of his mission and Word (v.24) generate awe and worship in our hearts? Discuss and reflect.
5. The earnest prayer of the church significantly affected the outcome of events in this chapter. How is your motivation to pray influenced by this truth?