



THE BEGINNING OF JESUS' CHURCH





We believe that we are designed to do life in authentic community and small groups are an important piece of that community. We desire to engage with Scripture each time we gather and to listen to what God has to say to us through His living Word. Over the next season, we will journey through Acts together as a community. When our groups gather, we will read, discuss and pray.



READ:

We will read each passage multiple times. Consider reading once out loud alternating readers and once silently.

DISCUSS:

We will take time to reflect on these three questions as a group.

1. What part of the text stood out to you? Why do you think that is?
2. What do you notice about God or His character in this passage?
3. Is there an invitation or a response to this passage I need to take?

PRAY:

We want to create sacred space in our small groups for prayer. In this guide, you will find prayers that have been adapted from Eugene Peterson's *Praying With the Early Christians*.

In our groups, we seek to invite people of all backgrounds into a shared, prayerful engagement with Scripture that encourages Spirit-led insight, personal response, and gentle vulnerability. The goal is that our time together would not be based on *information, but formation*.

SESSION 1

READ: ACTS 1

Read the text all the way through two times. Consider reading once out loud alternating readers and once silently. Take your time making your way through the verses.

DISCUSS:

What part of the text stood out to you? Why do you think that is?

What do you notice about God or His character in this passage?

Is there an invitation or a response to this passage I need to take?

PRAY:

We wait for your promise, O God. Everything that you have done in Jesus, do now in us. We want our lives to be the holy land in which you speak your word and demonstrate your ministry. Help us make our home in your word so that nothing other people can do will throw us off track from following you and help us see everything, even those things that look absolutely disastrous, in the context of your providence, which steadily moves to redemption. In Jesus' name. Amen.

SESSION 2

READ: ACTS 2:1-41

Read the text all the way through two times. Consider reading once out loud alternating readers and once silently. Take your time making your way through the verses.

What part of the text stood out to you? Why do you think that is?

What do you notice about God or His character in this passage?

Is there an invitation or a response to this passage I need to take?

PRAY:

Holy Spirit, lower barriers of defensiveness between us and our neighbors; eliminate suspicion that separates us from other Christians; include us in the company of those you are making into a whole and harmonious church. Amen.

SESSION 3

READ: ACTS 2:42-47 AND ACTS 3

Read the text all the way through two times. Consider reading once out loud alternating readers and once silently. Take your time making your way through the verses.

DISCUSS:

What part of the text stood out to you? Why do you think that is?

What do you notice about God or His character in this passage?

Is there an invitation or a response to this passage I need to take?

PRAY:

Dear God, you are Lord our hearts; be also Lord of our bank accounts. Teach us your merciful and gracious ways in that we do, including that ways we spend our money and use our possessions.

SESSION 4

READ: ACTS 4 AND 5:1-11

Read the text all the way through two times. Consider reading once out loud alternating readers and once silently. Take your time making your way through the verses.

DISCUSS:

What part of the text stood out to you? Why do you think that is?

What do you notice about God or His character in this passage?

Is there an invitation or a response to this passage I need to take?

PRAY:

Almighty God, you are the one who is at work in this world, Almighty God, not us. We want our words and gestures to refer to you, not call attention to ourselves. It will hardly matter to people if they remember any of us; it makes all the difference if they know yours. Amen.

SESSION 5

READ: ACTS 5:12-42

Read the text all the way through two times. Consider reading once out loud alternating readers and once silently. Take your time making your way through the verses.

DISCUSS:

What part of the text stood out to you? Why do you think that is?

What do you notice about God or His character in this passage?

Is there an invitation or a response to this passage I need to take?

PRAY:

God, what seems like a dead end to us is, by your grace, a wide highway; what we experience as wretchedness is the very place in which you demonstrate deliverance. Increase our faith so that we will meet setbacks with expectations, wondering how you will use them for your glory. Amen.

SESSION 6

READ: ACTS 6:1-15

Read the text all the way through two times. Consider reading once out loud alternating readers and once silently. Take your time making your way through the verses.

DISCUSS:

What part of the text stood out to you? Why do you think that is?

What do you notice about God or His character in this passage?

Is there an invitation or a response to this passage I need to take?

PRAY:

Father, we thank you for those who devote themselves to prayer and to serving the word, and we thank you for others, full of the Spirit and of wisdom who wait on tables. We need them both. Amen.

SESSION 7

READ: ACTS 7

Read the text all the way through two times. Consider reading once out loud alternating readers and once silently. Take your time making your way through the verses.

DISCUSS:

What part of the text stood out to you? Why do you think that is?

What do you notice about God or His character in this passage?

Is there an invitation or a response to this passage I need to take?

PRAY:

God of our ancestors, you have led your people across every kind of terrain and through every kind of weather. You know your way around the pains and difficulties of soul and society. Give us the long look, which sees victories of faith and triumphs of love, that we may be steady and sure in our walk with you. Amen.

SESSION 8

READ: ACTS 8

Read the text all the way through two times. Consider reading once out loud alternating readers and once silently. Take your time making your way through the verses.

DISCUSS:

What part of the text stood out to you? Why do you think that is?

What do you notice about God or His character in this passage?

Is there an invitation or a response to this passage I need to take?

PRAY:

Lead us, God, into places of meeting and opportunities for witness with neighbors who hold the middle ground we bypass or avoid, particularly those with whom we have little in common and among who we have let out of place. Use us to break down walls of separation and to develop enclaves of community. Amen.

SESSION 9

READ: ACTS 9:1-31

Read the text all the way through two times. Consider reading once out loud alternating readers and once silently. Take your time making your way through the verses.

DISCUSS:

What part of the text stood out to you? Why do you think that is?

What do you notice about God or His character in this passage?

Is there an invitation or a response to this passage I need to take?

PRAY:

Turn us around, O God, turn us from running so hard toward what we think is right that we miss the signs pointing to your will for us. Do whatever is necessary to get us to stop, look, and listen to what you have to say to us, in Jesus. Help us, God, to be like Ananias: responsive to your will, even when we don't understand it; willing to change our idea of another, even when it doesn't make sense to us; ready to pray for help and the person we were convinced was both your enemy and ours. Amen.

SESSION 10

READ: ACTS 9:32-43

Read the text all the way through two times. Consider reading once out loud alternating readers and once silently. Take your time making your way through the verses.

DISCUSS:

What part of the text stood out to you? Why do you think that is?

What do you notice about God or His character in this passage?

Is there an invitation or a response to this passage I need to take?

PRAY:

Lord, we accept too many things as the last word when they are only the next-to-last word. The last word is yours; and it is a word of life, not of death. All praise to the living God! Amen.

SESSION 11

READ: ACTS 10-11

Read the text all the way through two times. Consider reading once out loud alternating readers and once silently. Take your time making your way through the verses.

DISCUSS:

What part of the text stood out to you? Why do you think that is?

What do you notice about God or His character in this passage?

Is there an invitation or a response to this passage I need to take?

PRAY:

God, when we excuse our disobedience and inattention by saying that where we are and who we are is so insignificant that it can't make much difference anyway, ignore our excuses and repeat your commands, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

SESSION 12

READ: ACTS 12

Read the text all the way through two times. Consider reading once out loud alternating readers and once silently. Take your time making your way through the verses.

DISCUSS:

What part of the text stood out to you? Why do you think that is?

What do you notice about God or His character in this passage?

Is there an invitation or a response to this passage I need to take?

PRAY:

God of grace, whenever we read these scriptures closely we realize that most of the action takes place behind the scenes—in years of praying preparations, in long stretches of hidden faithfulness. Help us to embrace in praise the obscure parts of our life as well as the clear signs of your favor. Amen.

SESSION 13

READ: ACTS 13-14

Read the text all the way through two times. Consider reading once out loud alternating readers and once silently. Take your time making your way through the verses.

DISCUSS:

What part of the text stood out to you? Why do you think that is?

What do you notice about God or His character in this passage?

Is there an invitation or a response to this passage I need to take?

PRAY:

Grant, God, that we may, this day, work obediently, love consistently, continue faithfully, and praise joyfully. And when this day's tasks are completed, prepare me for tomorrow's. Amen.

SESSION 14

READ: ACTS 15

Read the text all the way through two times. Consider reading once out loud alternating readers and once silently. Take your time making your way through the verses.

DISCUSS:

What part of the text stood out to you? Why do you think that is?

What do you notice about God or His character in this passage?

Is there an invitation or a response to this passage I need to take?

PRAY:

God, we are not glad that Paul and Barbara's had that fight, but we are glad to know about it—to know that their mission was not conditional on their virtue but on your grace, and to know that you used them not because they were sinless but because they received your forgiveness for their sins. Amen.

SESSION 15

READ: ACTS 16

Read the text all the way through two times. Consider reading once out loud alternating readers and once silently. Take your time making your way through the verses.

DISCUSS:

What part of the text stood out to you? Why do you think that is?

What do you notice about God or His character in this passage?

Is there an invitation or a response to this passage I need to take?

PRAY:

Grant, Lord, that the generosity we admire in others like Lydia would become functional in us; an open-hearted readiness to receive your word, an open-handed friendship in receiving your children in our homes. Amen.

SESSION 16

READ: ACTS 17

Read the text all the way through two times. Consider reading once out loud alternating readers and once silently. Take your time making your way through the verses.

DISCUSS:

What part of the text stood out to you? Why do you think that is?

What do you notice about God or His character in this passage?

Is there an invitation or a response to this passage I need to take?

PRAY:

We praise you, God, for a gospel that changes things at the center, that overthrows evil at the source, that turns the world upside down and makes all things new, in and through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

SESSION 17

READ: ACTS 18

Read the text all the way through two times. Consider reading once out loud alternating readers and once silently. Take your time making your way through the verses.

DISCUSS:

What part of the text stood out to you? Why do you think that is?

What do you notice about God or His character in this passage?

Is there an invitation or a response to this passage I need to take?

PRAY:

God, you have given us good work to do. Forge a strong link between our places of work and our places of worship, so that what we do with our mind and hands and what we do with our prayers and praises would be coordinated to your glory, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

SESSION 18

READ: ACTS 19

Read the text all the way through two times. Consider reading once out loud alternating readers and once silently. Take your time making your way through the verses.

DISCUSS:

What part of the text stood out to you? Why do you think that is?

What do you notice about God or His character in this passage?

Is there an invitation or a response to this passage I need to take?

PRAY:

Father, we greatly fear the influences of the world's gods and goddesses on our lives—deities of money and of lust. Protects us from their power and help us to conduct our lives under the banner of redemptive love, as revealed in Jesus Christ. Amen.

SESSION 19

READ: ACTS 20

Read the text all the way through two times. Consider reading once out loud alternating readers and once silently. Take your time making your way through the verses.

DISCUSS:

What part of the text stood out to you? Why do you think that is?

What do you notice about God or His character in this passage?

Is there an invitation or a response to this passage I need to take?

PRAY:

God, when the time comes, help us to release friends and family to your leading, remembering that there is “a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to throw away”. Amen.

SESSION 20

READ: ACTS 21-23:11

Read the text all the way through two times. Consider reading once out loud alternating readers and once silently. Take your time making your way through the verses.

DISCUSS:

What part of the text stood out to you? Why do you think that is?

What do you notice about God or His character in this passage?

Is there an invitation or a response to this passage I need to take?

PRAY:

We pray, Father, for the leaders in our government. Use them to preserve the orders of justice in which your will may be done and your kingdom come; for Jesus' sake, to whom be the power and the glory forever. Amen.

SESSION 21

READ: ACTS 23:12-24:27

Read the text all the way through two times. Consider reading once out loud alternating readers and once silently. Take your time making your way through the verses.

DISCUSS:

What part of the text stood out to you? Why do you think that is?

What do you notice about God or His character in this passage?

Is there an invitation or a response to this passage I need to take?

PRAY:

We praise your great name, Almighty God. We thank you for all the dark days when we thought we were at the end of our ropes and then found ourselves secure in your protective hand, saved by your grace in Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

SESSION 22

READ: ACTS 25-26

Read the text all the way through two times. Consider reading once out loud alternating readers and once silently. Take your time making your way through the verses.

DISCUSS:

What part of the text stood out to you? Why do you think that is?

What do you notice about God or His character in this passage?

Is there an invitation or a response to this passage I need to take?

PRAY:

Give us the skill, all-wise God, to read the meaning of events in the light of your purposes and in the confidence of your love, and so find cause to praise your name in everything, in Jesus' name. Amen.

SESSION 23

READ: ACTS 27

Read the text all the way through two times. Consider reading once out loud alternating readers and once silently. Take your time making your way through the verses.

DISCUSS:

What part of the text stood out to you? Why do you think that is?

What do you notice about God or His character in this passage?

Is there an invitation or a response to this passage I need to take?

PRAY:

Thank you, dear God, for friends who lighten burdens, deepen joys, and expand our life in the resurrection fellowship of your love. Amen.

SESSION 24

READ: ACTS 28

Read the text all the way through two times. Consider reading once out loud alternating readers and once silently. Take your time making your way through the verses.

DISCUSS:

What part of the text stood out to you? Why do you think that is?

What do you notice about God or His character in this passage?

Is there an invitation or a response to this passage I need to take?

PRAYER:

Fix our faith firmly, O God, in your love revealed in Jesus so that we would not be tossed to and fro. Rescue us from groundless fears and mis-directed enthusiasms. Put us on a level path, steady in our praise and habitual in our obedience, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

