

A C T S

O F T H E S P I R I T



PART ONE

ACTS OF THE SPIRIT

The book of Acts is a record of how the church was born. Early followers of Jesus were empowered by the Holy Spirit, and the message of Jesus spread from Jerusalem to Rome. Jesus' mandate and promise to his followers is that they would receive power (the Holy Spirit) and be his witnesses in Jerusalem/Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). As we read about these places and the people they are called to engage, they fall into three categories. First, Jesus addresses witnesses sent to Jerusalem/Judea, which were both near them physically, and like them culturally (near us and like us). Secondly, they were sent to Samaria. That was physically fairly close, but culturally very different (near us but different from us). And lastly, they were being sent to 'the ends of the earth' to those who were physically far off and culturally very different (far away and different). That same mandate and promise extends to us! As a church, we are on a similar journey of our own, to obey the command that Jesus gave the early church and adopt it as our own. We can step into the ongoing story of Acts right here in Hershey and around the world!

PART ONE

NEAR US AND LIKE US

All journeys have a beginning. For those early disciples, near us and like us would be Jerusalem and Judea. This area represented the people who were most near them physically and most like them culturally (language and religion). For us, our beginning is Hershey and the surrounding communities. Just as Jesus promised that they would be his witnesses to the people near them and like them, so too Christ is sending us and empowering us to be his witnesses to our neighbors, classmates, coworkers, and friends, to those who are near us and like us. While this sounds simple, in some ways this is the most difficult! Our hope is that we can inspire and equip you to make a difference to the people you interact with on a daily basis.

DID YOU KNOW?

There has probably never been a more affluent society than middle-class America. And yet, the level of despair is almost palpable around us here in “the sweetest place on earth”! Christ has sent us to be his witnesses to those in our surrounding area. Below are some facts and figures to help you understand our surroundings a bit better.

ACCORDING TO THE 2020 CENSUS DATA:

230,000 people live within 10 miles of Hershey Free Church.

37% are under 30 years old.

Almost **30%** are single-parent homes!

Of those, **76,000** have no involvement in church or any faith.

“Individuals of all ages, but especially our school-aged children, teens, and young adults are struggling more and more with crippling anxiety and depression.”

(Local school counselor)

“Connecting (and re-connecting) with others has become increasingly challenging over the past few years as folks isolate and social media prevails. Many crave deeper human connection and genuine belonging.”

(Local school counselor)

“With an annual inflation rate of 9% and increases in energy, food, and housing costs above the inflation rate, our lower-income families are struggling to maintain housing and keep food on the table. Now is the time that we all need to come together to support our neighbors in need.”

(Love INC Director)

“We have seen a significant increase in the mental health needs of our students and families. Social isolation and other factors in the home have led to increases in social-emotional concerns. We have found it necessary to teach and model appropriate interactions and behaviors more explicitly and frequently.”

(Local Elementary School Principal)

WHAT CAN I DO?

It may seem like all of this is bad news, and the early church could have felt the same way. They were immediately faced with persecution and false teaching. But the book of Acts also shows how these believers persevered in hard times and committed to prayer and the ministry of the gospel. The Word of God is alive and active. The Holy Spirit empowers each of us as we remember the words in **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**:

“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

FIRST, PRAY.

Pray these prayers in your own words. Pray specific names of people in your life. Pray for your school district. Pray for our government. There is no right or wrong way to pray as long as you start.

1

Pray for your neighbors, coworkers, teachers, and friends.

Dear Lord, my heart is burdened for my family and friends who don't know the hope of the gospel. I know how hard life can be, and for many, there seems to be no way out. I pray that you will soften their hearts and give me opportunities to share the good news of Jesus. I pray that you give me wisdom and courage as I seek to make a difference and bring hope in the darkness.

2

Pray for the churches in our area.

Dear Lord, I pray specifically for Hershey Free Church as we seek to share the gospel with those in our communities who don't yet know the truth. Help us to faithfully preach the gospel and be a people who love others. Show us how we can care for others. I pray this same prayer for all the local churches.

Protect those who lead these churches and give them wisdom and strength.

3

Pray for the schools in our area, especially the ones in your district!

Heavenly Father, thanks for the hard work of the teachers and administration in educating children. Please let the children, the teachers, and the staff of our school come to understand their need for your grace. May the school be a safe and life-giving place that helps these young people to thrive and reflect your character.

4

Pray for the local government authorities to have wisdom and courage as they lead.

Gracious God, thank you for establishing authorities to keep peace and order. May our leaders have wisdom and courage as they lead through difficult times. Let there be peace even in the midst of difficult political times.



SECOND, TAKE A TANGIBLE NEXT STEP

Over the next several weeks, as the Acts of the Spirit sermon series kicks off, pick one or two of the following activities and try something new. It's okay if it doesn't go exactly as planned.

Sign up for prayer prompts, encouragement, and next step ideas related to the Acts of the Spirit series by texting the word **ACTS** to **717-537-9172**.



Prayer walk your neighborhood. Consider joining with other families in praying for your community! (Acts 1:14)



Share a meal with a neighbor. Invite some non-churched folks over for dinner, dessert, s'mores, or whatever!



Journal everyone you meet in a day. Perhaps ask their name and let them know you are praying for them (Acts 3:1-8).



Send a note to local police/firefighters/school/government officials letting them know you appreciate their hard work and that you are praying.



Clean up some place! Grab some gloves, some trash bags, and go for a walk. Clean up a park, a trail, the front of a school, or any place you'd like.



Ask one more question! When you interact with people, ask one more question. Just see how the Lord works when you show a genuine interest in people.



Be social! If you use social media, share something that God is doing in your life!

