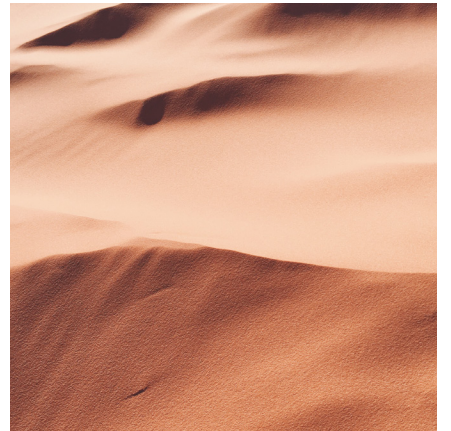
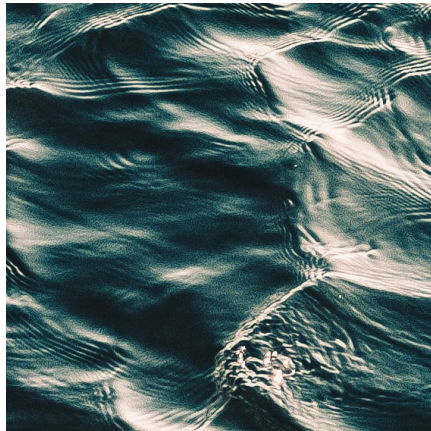




ACTS





WHAT IS JESUS XP?

Jesus XP is a group-based, Jesus-centered discipleship experience. Together, groups explore the ways Jesus connected with God and others by reading The Bible, discovering practices that center us in the Jesus way and learning how to apprentice with Jesus in everyday life.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING A JESUS XP SESSION?

Jesus XP sessions include the following: Check-in, Bible reading and Practices.

SESSION 1: THE CHECK-IN

The check in creates space for participants to unpack what Jesus is inviting them into through the Bible reading and practices. Every week, the group will check in with each other on life, what you've been reading, and the practices you are trying out as you experience Jesus.

SESSION 2: BIBLE READING

The Bible portion helps participants immerse themselves in the words and ways of Jesus. Most groups read at least a portion of a chapter out loud together each week and share about what pops up. There is a chapter summary and some "example guiding questions" included in each week's session. Feel free to use those questions or come up with your own.



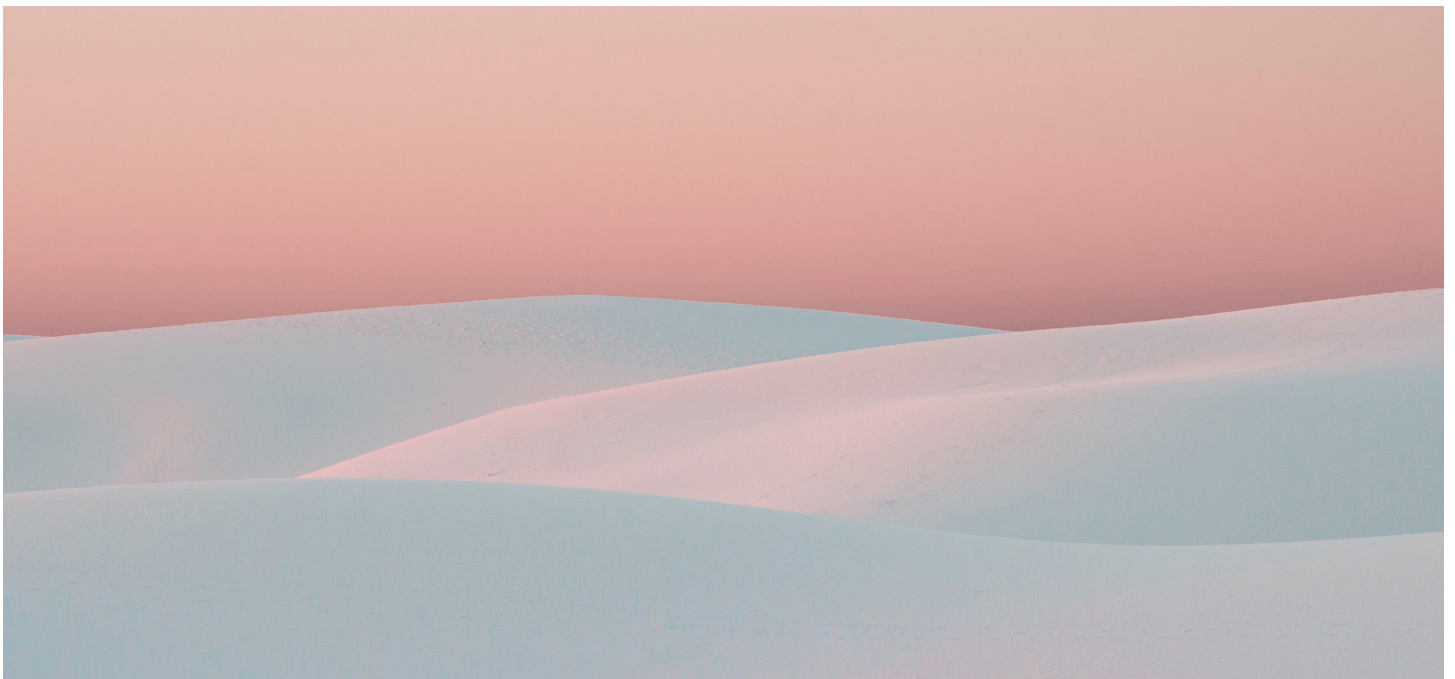
SESSION 3: PRACTICES

A practice exploration provides participants with tangible ways to connect with God, themselves and others. There is no right order to do the practices in. Sometimes, groups will try a new practice each week or spend a couple weeks on a practice that seems to be life-giving. It's also fine to do more than one practice at a time. Choose together as a group how you want to approach the practices included in Jesus XP.

ACTS of the APOSTLES | OVERVIEW

The book of Acts is not actually about the “acts” of the apostles. Although it mainly talks about Peter and Paul, the book is trying to persuade us of something. The message of Jesus found in the gospels is a universal message from Jerusalem to the farthest ends of the known world at the time. This is what makes the book of Acts unique! It’s the only book in the Bible that records the historical transition from Judaism to Christianity. Of course, Paul’s letters give us a supportive theology around Jesus’ life and message . But the book of Acts is completely necessary to understand Paul’s transformation and his letters. Without the book of Acts, we wouldn’t be persuaded that the Holy Spirit is continuing the work of Jesus in all of humanity. The Holy Spirit is the main character, and all of humanity is invited into the story.

“This book may be called an account of the beginning of the bringing of God’s supply to humanity to meet its need.”



AUTHOR

Luke—the author of one of the four Gospels found in the New Testament of the Bible also composed Acts. Luke intended his Gospel and Acts as a two-volume set.

Luke is the only known Gentile (non-Jewish) writer in the New Testament. Interestingly Luke was not an eyewitness of Jesus. Luke—based on the prelude in Luke chapter 1—is functioning as an historian in a way the first century reader would understand.

Luke collected eyewitness accounts of the life, stories and teachings of Jesus —and collated them together in his two volume set. Fun fact: roughly 50% of Luke’s collected stories of Jesus are NOT found in any other Gospel! Fun fact 2: Luke records 18 parables not found in the other Gospels—including “the Good Samaritan” and “the Prodigal Son.”

Luke was a co-worker with Paul the apostle – who contributed to a large portion of the writings of the New Testament – and is believed to have been a native of Antioch. It’s possible a fair amount of Acts – from Antioch on – is potentially a first-person eyewitness account of this unfolding Jesus Movement.

DATE

The original edition of Acts undoubtedly was written in the second half of the first century—within 30-40 years of Jesus’ resurrection. Since Acts does not mention the death of Paul the apostle nor the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, this original edition was likely penned before both events. (Paul was killed by Caesar Nero in Rome between 62-67CE. The Jerusalem Temple was destroyed by Rome in 70 CE)



3 KEYS TO UNDERSTANDING ACTS

EVERYTHING IS BASED ON (OR HINGES ON) THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

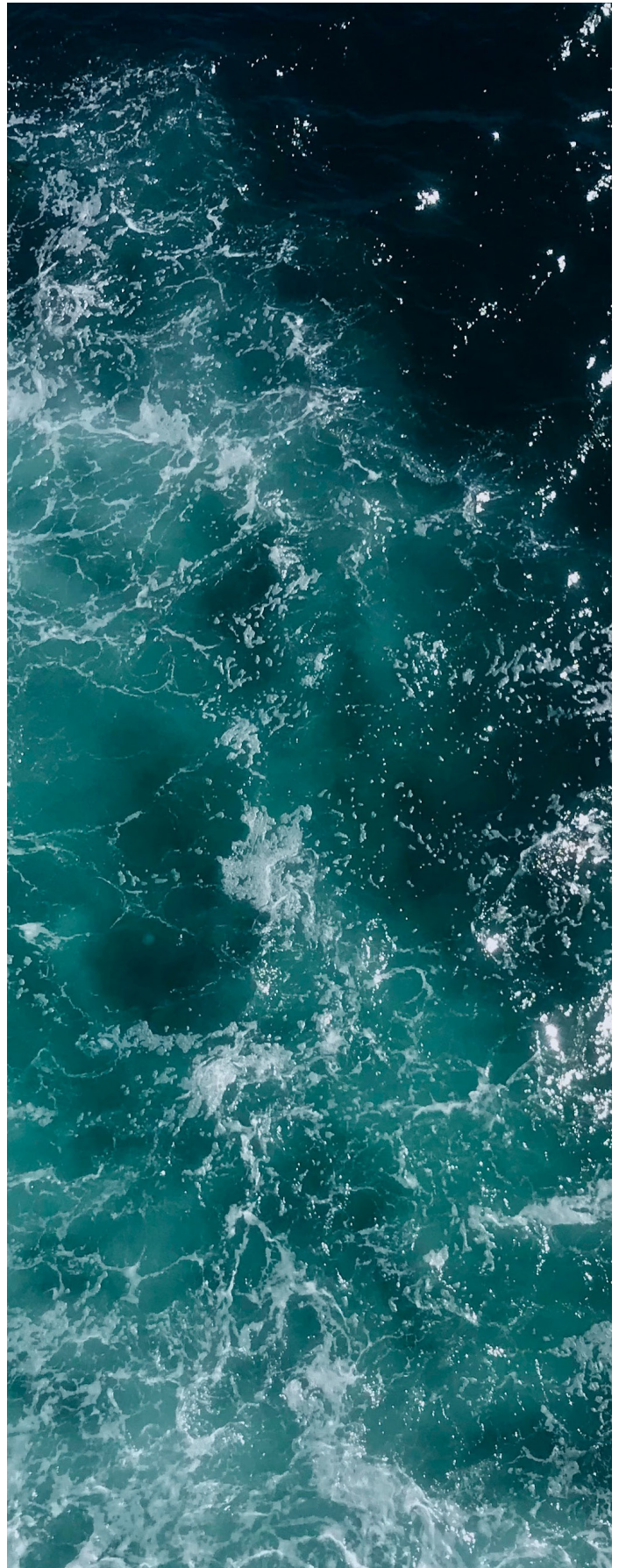
The closing chapter in the Gospel of Luke describes scenes in which Jesus met his followers after being raised from the dead: he was really alive, richly alive, in a transformed body that could eat and drink as well as walk and talk but which seemed to have . . . some unexpected properties. His body could, for instance, appear and disappear, and come and go through locked doors. Jesus' transformed body is ground zero of God's new creation. Jesus' risen body is the beginning of a brand new reality which is both at home in this physical world, and which is at home in the heavenly sphere. Without the resurrection there is no gospel, no ongoing work of Jesus. There would only be the sad memory of a great, but failed teacher and would-be Messiah.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE CONTINUED PRESENCE OF JESUS

Luke insists that the Holy Spirit is present – guiding and leading these first followers of Jesus—just as Jesus promised when he called the Holy Spirit his “representative” who will “lead [us] into all truth”.

JESUS IS ABOUT TO DO SOMETHING NEW (FOR EVERYONE)

One of the core central themes of Acts, indeed of the New Testament, is that Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and teachings were for all of humanity—Jews and Gentiles, young and old, men and women, rich and poor. Over time, this Jesus Movement was increasingly seen as distinct from Judaism, which both unleashed a movement of unexpected radical hospitality in Jesus's name while also unleashing waves of resistance and persecution from the Roman government and cultural elites.



STRUCTURE

Luke chose a series of overlapping themes based on geographical expansion of the Good News, expansion of the Good News from Jews exclusively to the inclusion of Gentiles and following the stories of key apostolic leaders in the early church. Luke shows remarkable skill in weaving all the themes together in a compelling narrative!

THEMES TO NOTE:

From Jerusalem to Rome

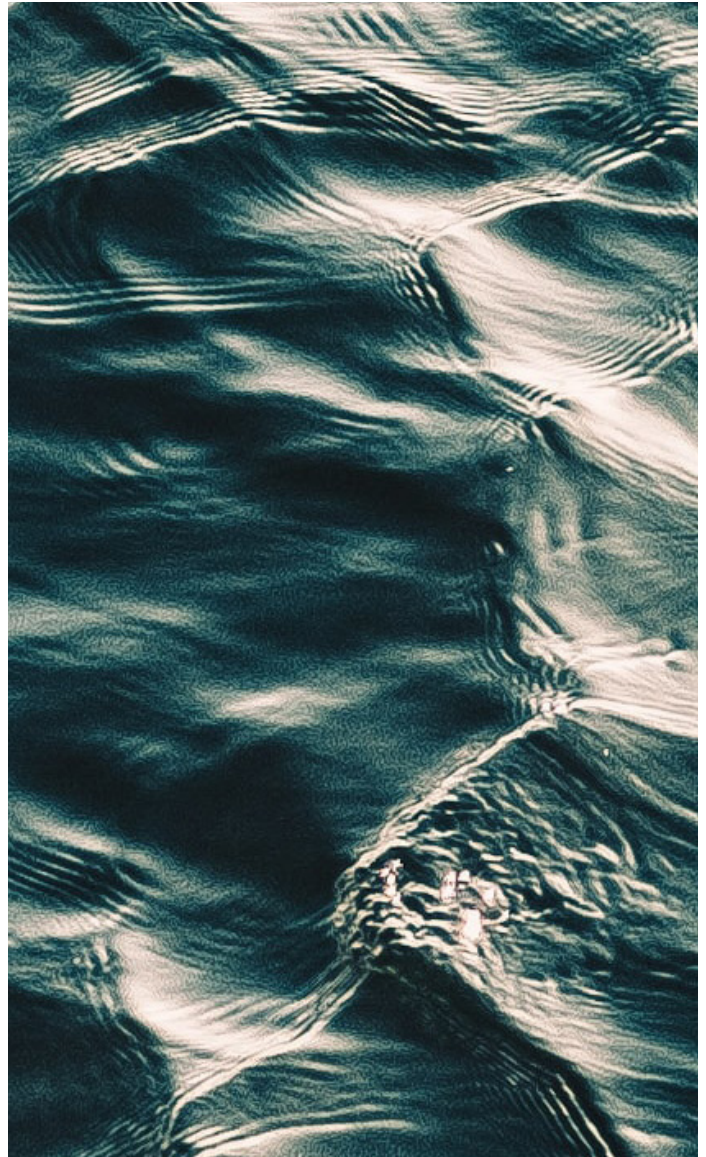
This structure can be also seen as a series of concentric circles, where the gospel begins in the center, Jerusalem, and is expanding ever outward to Judea & Samaria, Syria, Asia Minor, Europe, to Rome and eventually to the ends of the known world. Luke-quoting Jesus in Acts 1:8- highlights this geographic expansion theme.

From very Jewish to unexpectedly Universal

The first two sections in Acts (chapters 1-9) focuses on the apostolic witness to Jews, while the last section (chapters 10-28) focuses on the witness of the apostles to the Gentile world.

From Peter to Paul

The book of Acts can also be structured around two major characters shared in the book: Peter (chapters 1-12) and Paul (chapters 13-28).



SPOILER

ACTS doesn't really end . . . it has an ending which isn't really an ending: the story just keeps going and going: we are literally living out the continuation of Acts today.

What might Jesus be up to as you go about living your everyday life? What would it look like for you to join Jesus in his mission through you?



#1 ACTS 9

The Experience

Saul's Conversion and Ananias' Obedience

Remember, in chapter 7, when Stephen was stoned to death for his faith in Jesus? Saul was present for the stoning. In fact, he condoned it, and his presence caused many Christ followers to flee Jerusalem. Saul was trying to track them down, even traveling 150 miles to Damascus to enslave and kill them. On that journey, he had an experience with the risen Christ that forever transformed who he was and what he did. The conversion of Saul is a turning point in the book of Acts, and a reminder to all of us that Christ is truly alive. His Spirit is finding His home in the hardest of hearts. Ananias was instrumental in helping Saul experience Christ's presence after his initial conversion. The Spirit continues to reveal God in the face of Christ and through the faces of His people. The right way to come to Jesus is whatever way God brings you.

EXAMPLE GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- How do you think the persecuted Christians responded to Saul's conversion?
- Why is it significant that every Christian had to go through persecution in Acts so far?
- What area of your life does God want to intersect your journey and reveal Jesus once again (or for the first time)?
- Is God asking you to be an advocate for someone who is considered a lost cause by the religious people?

#2 ACTS 10

Better Together

Cornelius Calls for Peter

how the Spirit sent Ananias to Saul, Peter is called to help Cornelius believe in the the God who revealed himself in Jesus. Cornelius wasn't a believer in Jesus, but he was seeking God in the way he knew how. From here the gospel will fan out in all directions to people across a vast array of geographical regions in ever-widening circles of influence and reach. The barrier for the Gospel has been whether or not unclean Gentiles were included or only God's chosen people, the Jews. And, so far, the only way to become clean is to become Jewish – in belief and custom. Peter (who was the leader of the early Church movement) now gives his approval of God's universal acceptance, through Christ, to all people. In Acts 2, Peter's message is accompanied with a visible representation of the Holy Spirit coming upon people. The same thing happens here! It's as if the Spirit is affirming God's affection and attention towards the Gentiles.

EXAMPLE GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- When has God sent someone who crossed your path and helped you see Jesus?
- What practices can we do that would help us stay as humble and spiritually hungry as Cornelius?
- Peter, a Jew, and Cornelius, a Gentile, stayed with one another for a few days. How does the presence of the Spirit change how you view the "unclean" and welcome them in?
- Have you ever felt like the unclean one?

#3 ACTS 11

Becoming Christians The Church at Antioch

The Gospel is still traveling under the radar. Peter was criticized for sharing the Gospel with Cornelius, but his Jewish critics finally believe him. We all know this tension. It's hard to allow the outsiders in your life to finally be insiders. It doesn't stop with Peter's actions, though. Barnabas went to get Paul to take him to Antioch so the two of them could spend a year meeting with Jesus followers. Instead of going to other cities, Paul and Barnabas saw value in helping develop new converts into mature disciples.. From converts to mature disciples. And what are we to call those who have matured by the Spirit, under the message of Jesus? The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch. What a beautiful picture of Christian unity we see in the original community of Jesus' disciples who were unified by the Spirit and treated the message of Jesus as if it was the hope of the world. It doesn't seem like an accident that Paul's missionary journeys to come will launch from Antioch.

EXAMPLE GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- As you read this chapter, what character do you identify with? Why do you think that is?
- Who has been your advocate while you make steps towards Jesus?
- How will you spend the next year intentionally living around people who are not yet believers?
- Paul and Barnabas were committed to the mission together. In what ways do you rely on someone to help you with your calling?

#4 ACTS 12

Quick Stop in Prison Peter's Miraculous Escape

Once again, the kingdoms of this world were threatened by the Kingdom of God. And the irony of it all is that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church!" The more Jesus followers that die, the more people that follow Jesus - wild! In this chapter, King Herod kills one of the original 12 disciples, James the brother of John, and he throws Peter in prison. Peter thinks he is having a vision, but he is actually being delivered from prison miraculously. Later in the chapter, King Herod is killed by an angel of the Lord for acting like he is God in front of his people. He has no problem appropriating God's glory for his own. What a plot twist! Those who died for God's glory continue to live in the story that God is writing, while those who stole God's glory as their own died and were eaten by worms. We will all end up living and dying for someone's glory. May it not be our own.

EXAMPLE GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What do you think it would feel like to watch someone you know give their life for their faith?
- Christian suffering is different now. How can you identify the difference between an inconvenience and actual suffering?



#5 ACTS 13

The Spirit Sends and Speaks Barnabas and Paul Sent Out

A group of Christians living on mission together—that's what we call a church! The Church at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas out by the leading of the Spirit. They went West taking John Mark with them. This was Paul's first missionary journey, but it wasn't his last. They went to cultural centers of the day like Cyprus, and they visited synagogues to tell Jews about the relationship they could now have with God. Under the power of the Holy Spirit, Paul made a sorcerer go blind. At one point during his journey in Antioch, Paul was asked to speak an encouraging word in the synagogue, and he ended it by quoting Isaiah: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." Do you notice how focused the Spirit is about inviting all people into the love of God?

EXAMPLE GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- How would you describe the Gospel, and is it good news to you?
- How can your insights about God remain rooted in Scripture like Paul's insights seem to be?



#6 ACTS 14

Gospel Planting Difficulty in Iconium

There was division among the Jews and Gentiles. The message that Paul and Barnabas were preaching created angst with the Jews. Being saved by grace is a lot different than the culturally-based salvation they were used to. And this new "good news" was a threat to the established, institutionalized religion in Iconium. Paul proves the truth of this message by signs and wonders. Still, signs and wonders are not enough to convince everyone. After being in Iconium for a while, they went to Lystra where the people worshipped Paul and Barnabas when they saw Paul heal a lame man. In this chapter we see that miracles are never the goal. Miracles, by themselves, will produce superficiality, not true spirituality. When spirituality becomes about what we can see, we will end up worshipping the wrong person or thing. Receiving the gospel and letting it transform you and your community is the goal. Ultimately, we see that people becoming disciples is the true miracle. Where there are disciples being formed, there are churches being established. Antioch was becoming a hub for church planting.

EXAMPLE GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- How would your friends and family respond to seeing signs and wonders? Have you ever experienced a miracle?
- Why is it relevant that this is the second time Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch for a while?
- There are two instances where Paul and Barnabas won the approval of the crowd. How does winning the approval of people affect how you speak about Jesus?

#7 ACTS 15

Disagreements, Disputes, and Determined Leaders

The council at Jerusalem

Which message is more radical: that you are saved by grace, or that you are saved by circumcision? This is the debate the early church leaders had to settle when more and more Gentiles were coming to know Jesus. Would these new believers have to become Jewish (by customs like circumcision) before they could become Christians? The Jews in Judea wanted to add some of their customs and law to these Gentiles coming to faith in Jesus. This caused some large disputes among the churches that were just starting in Antioch. The council in Jerusalem met and concluded that circumcision isn't necessary. What a relief! They wrote the churches a letter that solidified Paul and Barnabas' leadership and told the Christians a few things to abstain from. Mostly to keep the peace between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. Once some new leaders arrived with this letter, Paul and Barnabas had a disagreement about John Mark. The disagreement was so sharp it caused the two of them to separate and go their separate ways. Although at the beginning of the chapter they sought counsel from church leaders, this disagreement didn't compromise the gospel message. They dealt with it personally. They didn't gossip about one another, or try to compromise one another's ministries. They simply "parted company." Imagine that! Two Christians who part ways without posting about one another.

EXAMPLE GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What do you think it took for the Jewish leaders to lay down their customs to include the Gentiles?
- How do you think the Gentile believers felt?
- How can you better handle disagreements with other Christians?

#8 ACTS 16

Freedom From Chains

Timothy Joins Paul and Silas

What is the spiritual authority in your life?

Paul and Barnabas separated in the last chapter. Now, Paul is traveling with Silas and they pick up a new disciple named Timothy. Timothy later becomes a spiritual son to Paul, a pastor, and a disciple maker. To get there, however, Paul does advise Timothy to get circumcised so that he gains credibility with the Jews. It's as if this group is willing to do anything short of sin to see the gospel move forward in the world! Luke, the author of Acts, joins their journey and starts using the pronoun "we" in some of his accounts. After Paul has a vision, they head to Philippi where a woman named Lydia and her family are saved. Also in Philippi, a slave-girl is delivered from a demon, and Paul and Silas go to prison. The Lord frees them, and they preach the good news to the jailer before returning to Lydia's house. Did you notice a theme? Lydia was saved. The slave-girl was delivered. Paul and Silas were delivered. The jailer was saved. The gospel always results in freedom!

EXAMPLE GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What is it about the Jesus story that should lead us to freedom?
- In what ways are we living imprisoned?
- Timothy was devoted to the mission of God. Who can you be bringing with you on the mission?

#9 ACTS 17

*To the Unknown God
To Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens*

Paul preaches that Jesus is the Christ- it meant Jesus was the savior the Jews had been waiting for. The Jews get mad and want to kill him. This narrative sounds like a broken record, but it's breaking new ground for the gospel every time it happens! Paul, Silas, and Timothy experience pushback in the synagogues, but some believe. In Berea, the Bereans re-looked at the Scriptures to see if Jesus was the Christ and many of them find this message to be the true interpretation. From there, Paul is escorted to Athens where he is to wait for Silas and Timothy. Just like all of us, while he is waiting he started to notice things about his surroundings – peculiar statues made for worshipping false gods. And just in case the Athenians missed a god during their rituals, they had an inscription to an “unknown god.” Paul talks about Jesus as if He is this unknown god. His sermon feels brilliant when you read it, but only a few Greeks follow him. Luke is continuing to remind us that miracles and brilliant Ted Talks don't have 100% success rate.

EXAMPLE GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What is Jesus saying to you as you read about Paul talking about this “unknown god?”
- While you are waiting for the next step in your life, are you asking God how he can use you?
- How do you “examine the Scriptures” when you hear a message about Jesus?

#10 ACTS 18

*Religion Can be Irritating
Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos*

New town, same problem. Paul responds to Jewish persecution differently in Corinth. After reasoning in the Synagogue for weeks, Paul finally opposes the Jews by committing to only preach to Gentiles. As you have probably noticed so far, the Gentiles are more receptive to the message of grace than the Jews have been. However, God had a different plan and gave Paul a vision, instructing him to stay in Corinth longer. After a year and a half, Paul goes to Ephesus with Priscilla and Aquila and leaves them there to do ministry. While he is away, the two of them meet someone named Apollos. Apollos was like Paul in many ways. He engaged in public debates with Jews and he was a preacher of the Christ. God was relentless in pushing against the religion of the Jews! The Holy Spirit continued to send people who would speak to the minds and hearts of the religious.

EXAMPLE GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- Priscilla and Aquila were expelled from Rome by Emperor Claudius. How do you continue to obey Christ when you realize life isn't what you thought it was going to be?
- Have you ever felt like you were the only one in your life who was following Jesus?
- Have you ever felt like you were ready to give up on the “churchy people”?



PRACTICES

There is an invitation Jesus gave to people he wanted to do life with. You can find it all throughout the gospels (or the eye witness stories about Jesus).

He would look at someone and say to them, "Follow me." This invitation gets at the active, bodily . . . A disciple is a student – someone who is learning from a teacher. We are all invited to be disciples of Jesus. The goal of Jesus XP Practices is not to have you fill out worksheets and journals, but to put the ways of Jesus into practice in your everyday life.

Throughout Jesus XP you will be invited to try out and experience a variety of practices (some may call them spiritual practices or spiritual disciplines). Some may be new, while others may cause you to stretch beyond what is common and comfortable.

In the same way that you might engage in a new workout routine, don't short-cut the process. You might notice throughout Jesus XP that one or two practices really resonate and you connect to God, others and your true self. Maybe you'll consider adopting them into your regular rhythm of life.

Remember: The goal is not more knowledge but turning knowledge into love. The best life change happens as the words of Jesus move from your head to your heart through your hands.

During JesusXP | Acts you'll encounter six practices that you and your group will explore together. The intent is that they help you discover and live every day with a growing awareness that Jesus is with you in every moment, and inviting you to join him to help heal the world.

"You don't think your way into a new kind of living. You live your way into a new kind of thinking."

—Henri Nouwen

PRACTICE: DAILY READING

Start your day with Jesus.
Meet with Jesus before you look at your phone
each day. Here's how:

1. Read a small section of scripture.
2. Read it slowly.
3. Read it three times (Head, Heart, Hands)

FIRST TIME: HEAD

As you read, ask yourself:
"What do I notice?"

SECOND TIME: HEART

As you read, ask yourself:
"What do I feel?" and
"What do the characters in the story feel?"

THIRD TIME: HANDS

As you read, ask yourself:
"What is Jesus inviting me to do?"

Here are some suggested passages from each chapter:

Acts 9:1-6
Acts 10: 34-38
Acts 11:15-18
Acts 12:6-11

Acts 13:44-47
Acts 14:19-22
Acts 15:5-11
Acts 16:25-31

Acts 17:24-28
Acts 18:9-11 or 18:24-26

*This practice is adapted from a reading style called "Lectio Divina"
which means spiritual reading. You can find out more at newlife.tv/jesusxp

PRACTICE: MISSIONAL IMPULSE

Where is Jesus sending you?

This is an anywhere/anytime practice.

START WITH PRAYING:

“Jesus, show me what you see.” or “Jesus show me what you want me to do.”

PAY ATTENTION to the impulses that pop up . . .

Who do you think of?

Do you see someone who looks lonely?

Do you notice a need you can meet?

Do you feel drawn to show kindness?

DO what you can do:

Send a text

Stop by to see someone

Bring a gift

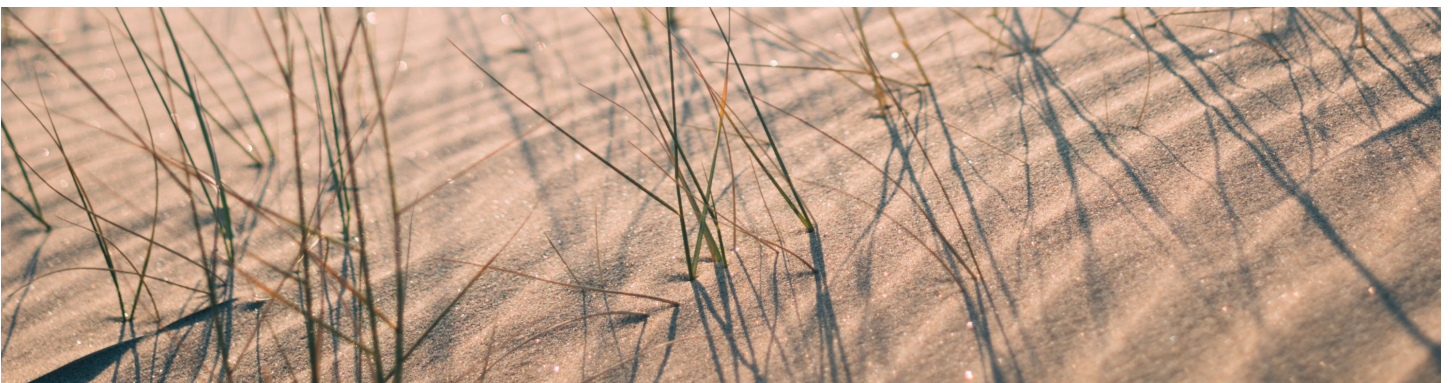
Give an encouraging word

Meet a need

*This might be scary at first, but it gets easier with practice.

It's important to learn the difference between missional impulse and your own impulse.

Reading the words of Jesus and recognizing how He responded to people and their needs will help.



PRACTICE: SHARING MEALS

Go be with people.

Jesus spent a lot of time eating with people and so did his followers. Some of the most powerful moments in Scripture include a meal. Who can you plan to share a meal with in the coming weeks – especially someone unexpected?

SHARE A MEAL

Who is in your life on a regular basis? Neighbors? Friends? Invite people in your life to a meal . . .

Don't like to cook? Order takeout! At school or work? Have lunch with someone new.

GO TO A MEAL

Say yes when someone new invites you to a meal. Allow yourself to be a guest at someone else's table.

THE LORD'S TABLE * *

Jesus invited his followers to remember him with a special meal sometimes called communion or the Lord's Table. When you are with your friends who follow Jesus, try taking communion together this week.

*** * HOW TO CELEBRATE COMMUNION OR THE LORD'S TABLE**

All you need is something to eat, something drink, and some people who want to remember how good Jesus's life, death, and resurrection are to them.

This special meal is a remembrance – something followers of Jesus throughout history have done because Jesus asked us to. (You can read Luke 22:14-20 together or to prepare).

You can take communion anywhere with any food items, but Jesus used bread and wine. The bread represents Jesus's body and the cup represents Jesus's blood.

You might say to one another as you eat and drink: This is Christ's body that was broken for you. This is Christ's blood shed for you.

Share about your gratefulness for Jesus around your table together.



PRACTICE: GIVE GOOD AWAY

Meet real needs in practical ways

Everything good we have comes from God. How can you use what God has given you to bring good to those around you? Here are three ideas:

STUFF

Some of us have a lot of stuff – maybe too much stuff. What if you look at the stuff you have and give the stuff you don't need to people who actually need it?

PROJECTS

With your group (or friends), think about the needs in your community. If there is way you can meet that need, do it together. EX: Clean up, support schools, serve meals . . .

MONEY

Something good happens in your heart when you are generous with your money. Is there a local church or organization you can be generous to? When you give, you'll see that good things will happen!

PRACTICE: TALK ABOUT WHAT JESUS IS DOING

How does your story connect with Jesus's story?

We all love good stories. Can you feel it? Jesus is doing something in your life. Just sharing with those around you the stuff He is already doing will invite others to notice Jesus, too.

It might help to make a list (on paper, on your phone, or to your friend) of where you've seen Jesus in the last week. Then, be ready to talk about it.



- With your friends who already know Jesus . . . encourage each other with what God is up to.
- With your friends who don't yet know Jesus . . . when someone asks you what you've been up to, just talk about what Jesus is doing.

You never know who might become more curious about Jesus by hearing your story. They might even join your JesusXP group.

PRACTICE: CREATE YOUR OWN PRACTICE

How do you best connect with Jesus?

Maybe you like to go on a walk or play a game with your kids? Maybe you want to serve your neighbor or make them cookies? Do you have a hobby that causes you to feel close to God? God made you uniquely and the way you connect with God is unique. Spend some time thinking about something you love to do that you can make into a spiritual practice.

1. Choose the thing you love to do
2. Pray before you do it - "Jesus, may I experience your presence while I _____."
3. Enjoy the activity you chose knowing Jesus is with you.
4. Think about or write about what you experienced during your practice.



