

LifeSharing Lesson 1 The Holy Spirit's Power Acts 1:1-11

1. What does it feel like to you to have power in your hands?

I feel as though it is now possible for me to make something happen!

Acts 1 Jesus Taken Up Into Heaven

¹ In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. ³ After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. ⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with ^[a] water, but in a few days you will be baptized with ^[b] the Holy Spirit."

⁶ So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. ¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

Commentary Material

Before documenting this rapid spread of the gospel, however, Luke asserted two important truths in what serves as an introduction to the book of Acts: (1) the indisputable fact of Christ's resurrection; and (2) the indispensable presence of the Holy Spirit. Apart from these two strong foundations, the church would be without hope and without power. What was true in the first century is still true today.

1:1-2 Dear Theophilus: In my first book I told you about everything Jesus began to do and teach until the day he ascended to heaven after giving his chosen

apostles further instructions from the Holy Spirit.^{NLT} Luke's opening statement ties this volume to his *first book*, the Gospel of Luke. That book was also addressed to *Theophilus*, whose name means "one who loves God." While some scholars have argued that this is a general term for all believers, it is more likely a proper name. When addressing Theophilus in [Luke 1:3](#), Luke called him "most excellent." A proper name with a title indicates that this was probably a real person, someone who belonged to the nobility, possibly as a high-ranking Roman official. Theophilus may have been Luke's patron who helped to finance the writing of both the Gospel and Acts. More likely Theophilus was a Roman acquaintance of Luke's with a strong interest in the new Christian religion.

Whether or not Theophilus was a believer, he had apparently learned some of the facts, but he may have needed further clarification. Luke set out to explain the entire gospel story to Theophilus, telling him *about everything Jesus began to do and teach until the day he ascended to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions from the Holy Spirit*. The translation "began to do and teach" shows that the books of Luke and Acts give the accurate account of the beginning of all that Christ was to do on earth. The book of Acts would show the continuation of his work on earth through his church, his body.

The following verses provide a bridge between the events recorded in Luke's Gospel and the events marking the beginning of the church. Before he "ascended to heaven," the resurrected Christ taught his disciples for forty days. In that short period, he gave those "chosen apostles" the instruction that would radically change their lives and, through them, the world. The fact that the apostles had been chosen by Christ ([Luke 6:12-16](#)) is an extremely important point. With that choosing came apostolic authority to preach, teach, direct the church, and preserve the record of his life and teaching. (For more on the Holy Spirit, see [1:8](#).)

[1:3](#) After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.^{NIV} "After his suffering" refers to Jesus' crucifixion. During the days after Christ rose from the dead, *he showed himself* to many of his followers (see the chart, "[Jesus' Appearances after His Resurrection](#)"). Christ showed himself and (as if more were needed) also *gave many convincing proofs that he was alive*.

The word "proofs" (tekmeriois) refers to demonstrated, decisive evidence. Jesus' resurrection had not been sleight of hand or illusion, with Jesus being merely a ghostly presence. Instead, these were solid, visible, and undeniable proofs of the fact that Jesus was alive.

The early Christians did not believe in the resurrection of Christ because they could *not* find his dead body; they believed because they *did* find a living Christ.

C. T. Craig

These proofs would form the heart and soul of the forthcoming witness of the church (from [Acts 1:8](#) forward). The apostles, and the church behind them, would spread the truth of Christ because they had seen him after he rose from the grave! If Jesus had not truly risen from the dead, then nothing that proceeds from this point on in the book of Acts (or the New Testament for that matter) would make any sense or make any difference in people's lives. (See Paul's comments in [1 Corinthians 15:13-14](#).)

Studying and using convincing proofs for the defense of Christianity (apologetics) is a valuable tool today. Not only does it help confirm the faith of Christians, but it also functions to help unbelievers come to faith. Many Christians today owe their conversion, humanly speaking, to the work of C. S. Lewis, whose apologetic arguments in *Mere Christianity* led them to believe. C. S. Lewis himself was converted by means of these kinds of arguments.

LIFE APPLICATION

FIVE RESULTS OF THE RESURRECTION

1. The Resurrection demonstrates that what Jesus predicted about his being raised was true ([Mark 8:31](#); [9:9](#), [31](#); [10:34](#); [John 2:19](#)).
2. The Resurrection proves that Jesus is the Son of God ([Romans 1:4](#)).
3. The Resurrection testifies to the success of Christ's mission of salvation ([Romans 4:25](#)).
4. The Resurrection entitles Jesus to a position of glory ([1 Peter 1:11](#)).
5. The Resurrection proclaims that Jesus is Lord ([Acts 2:36](#)).

During Jesus' post-Resurrection appearances, the main subject of Jesus' remarks was *the kingdom of God*. Throughout the Gospels the kingdom was always on Jesus' lips, for this unified his teachings and activities (see, for example, [Luke 13:18-21](#); [17:20-37](#)). When Christ came to earth, he brought God's kingdom, but it was not an earthly kingdom. The promised kingdom is present now only in part. The New Testament writers confirmed that through his death and resurrection, Christ bound Satan ([Colossians 2:15](#); [1 Peter 3:22](#)), provided forgiveness and holiness to sinners ([Romans 3:21-26](#); [Hebrews 9:11-12](#); [10:10](#)), and is now enthroned as Lord over all ([Acts 2:33-36](#); [5:31](#); [Ephesians 1:20-22](#)). Believers become participants of this kingdom through God's power ([Matthew 19:24-26](#); [John 3:3](#)), by repentance and trust in Jesus ([Matthew 4:17](#); [John 14:6](#); [Acts 8:12](#)). His kingdom began in the hearts of his followers. When Christ returned to heaven, God's kingdom remained in the hearts of all believers

through the presence of the Holy Spirit. God promised, however, that he would ultimately reign over all and bring about the end of all death and disease. The ultimate culmination of the kingdom of God will not be fully realized until Jesus Christ comes again to rule, defeat his enemies, and consummate the kingdom ([Matthew 24:29-31](#); [25:31-46](#); [John 14:1-3](#)). Before that time believers are to work to spread God's kingdom across the world. Often the term "kingdom," at least in Acts, is used almost synonymously with the gospel message—see [8:12](#); [19:8](#); [20:25](#); [28:23](#), [31](#).

LIFE APPLICATION

NO LEAP IN THE DARK

Jesus gave many proofs to the early followers. Today many people doubt Jesus' resurrection. But history records that Jesus appeared in bodily form to his disciples on many occasions after his resurrection, proving that he was alive. Note the change that occurred in the disciples' lives. At Jesus' death, they scattered; they were disillusioned and fearful. After seeing the resurrected Christ, they were fearless and risked everything to spread the good news about him around the world. They faced imprisonment, beatings, rejection, and martyrdom, yet they never compromised their mission. These men would not have risked their lives for something they knew was a fraud. They knew that Jesus had been raised from the dead, and the early church members were fired with their enthusiasm to tell others. We can have confidence in their testimony. Twenty centuries later we can know that our faith is based on solid, historical fact.

So we have the two aspects of Christianity that would soon spread like wildfire from the temple porticoes in Jerusalem: (1) convinced witnesses who had been with the resurrected Christ; and (2) a clear message of Christ's desire to rule in people's hearts and of his promise to return ([1:3-10](#)).

[1:4-5](#) In one of these meetings as he was eating a meal with them, he told them, "Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you what he promised. Remember, I have told you about this before. John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."^{NLT} As the risen Christ met with his disciples, here *eating a meal with them* (yet another of the

"convincing proofs" mentioned in [1:3](#)), he surely told them many things. Luke records only a handful of sentences from those forty days of instruction, so they certainly are important words. These statements of Jesus are loaded with significance, giving us not only the outline of the book of Acts, but the general outline of church history.

Christ first told his followers to stay in Jerusalem *until the Father sends you what he promised*. This points back to [Luke 24:49](#). He had spoken *about this before*, at the Last Supper: "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit" ([John 14:16-17](#) NLT; see also [John 14:26](#)).

This would be a new kind of baptism. *John baptized with water*, said Jesus, but these believers would *be baptized with the Holy Spirit*. John the Baptist had baptized people as a sign of repentance. They had confessed their sins and had determined to live as God wanted them to live. Baptism was an outward sign of commitment. To be effective, it had to be accompanied by an inward change of attitude leading to a changed life. John's baptism did not give salvation; it prepared a person to welcome the coming Messiah and receive *his* message and *his* baptism. John himself had said, "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming. . . . He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" ([Matthew 3:11](#) NRSV).

The "one" who was coming was Jesus, the promised Messiah. The coming of the Spirit had been prophesied as part of the Messiah's arrival:

- "I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants." ([Isaiah 44:3](#) NIV)
- "The time is coming. . . . I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. . . . For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." ([Jeremiah 31:31-34](#) NIV)
- "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." ([Ezekiel 36:26-27](#) NIV)
- "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days." ([Joel 2:28-29](#) NIV)

The Old Testament promised a time when God would demonstrate his purifying power among people ([Isaiah 32:15](#); [Ezekiel 39:29](#)). The prophets also looked forward to a purifying fire ([Isaiah 4:4](#); [Malachi 3:2](#)). This looked ahead to Pentecost ([Acts 2:1-6](#)), when the Holy Spirit would be sent by Jesus in the form of tongues of fire, empowering his followers to preach the gospel. All believers,

those who would later come to Jesus Christ for salvation, would receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the fire of purification (in the Greek one article precedes these words, indicating that they were not two separate baptisms). This baptism would purify and refine each believer. When Jesus baptized with the Holy Spirit, the entire person would be transformed by the Spirit's power.

If Jesus had stayed on earth, his physical presence would have limited the spread of the gospel because physically he could be in only one place at a time. After Christ was taken up into heaven, he would be spiritually present everywhere through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was sent so that God would be with and within his followers after Christ returned to heaven. The Spirit would comfort them, guide them to know his truth, remind them of Jesus' words, give them the right words to say, and fill them with power. As promised by Christ in the upper room ([John 13–17](#)) and by the Father (see Peter's speech in [Acts 2:17](#) and following), the Holy Spirit would be the next great event in the life of the church. Many believe it to be the very birth of the church.

LIFE APPLICATION

BELIEVERS HAVE PRIVILEGES

In a series of meetings with the living, resurrected Christ, the disciples had many questions answered. They became convinced of the Resurrection, learned about the kingdom of God, and discovered the truth about their power source—the Holy Spirit. By reading the Bible, we can sit with the resurrected Christ in his school of discipleship. By believing in him, we can receive his power through the Holy Spirit to be new people. By joining with other Christians in Christ's church, we can take part in doing his work on earth.

THE ASCENSION OF JESUS / [1:6-11](#)

When would the risen Lord set up his kingdom? This was the question uppermost in the apostles' minds. They were eagerly hoping for a glorious earthly kingdom free from Roman rule. Christ, however, sidestepped these questions about earthly kingdoms and divine timetables. Instead, he reminded his followers of their calling to be Spirit-filled witnesses who would take the gospel message everywhere. A spiritual revolution needed first to take place in the hearts and minds of people.

With this final charge on the top of the Mount of Olives, Christ ascended into heaven. Moments later divine messengers appeared and assured the apostles that the Lord would one day return in similar fashion.

1:6 So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"^{NIV} The average Jew of Jesus' day was looking forward with great anticipation to the literal coming of the Messiah's earthly kingdom and with it the restoration of the fortunes and military might that the nation had enjoyed under King David. Jesus had certainly taught a great deal about his coming kingdom in his ministry with the disciples. During this forty-day instruction period, the disciples had questions about the promised kingdom, for their anticipation had been heightened with their Master's resurrection from the dead. Fully expecting Jesus to bring in his kingdom on earth at that moment, the disciples asked: *"Are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"*

The coming of the kingdom was closely associated with the coming of the Holy Spirit (as implied in passages such as [Isaiah 32:15-20](#); [44:3-5](#); [Ezekiel 39:28-29](#); [Joel 2:28-3:1](#); [Zechariah 12:8-10](#)). When Christ told the disciples of the imminent coming of the Spirit, therefore, they were even more likely to assume the coming of the kingdom would also be at hand. During the years of Jesus' ministry on earth, the disciples continually had wondered about the coming of the kingdom and what their roles would be in it. In the traditional view, the Messiah would be an earthly conqueror who would free Israel from Rome. But the kingdom about which Jesus spoke was first of all a "spiritual" kingdom established in the hearts and lives of believers ([Luke 17:21](#)); behind it was the earthly kingdom that Christ promised to institute at his return.

Jesus' answer, disappointing to the disciples, was a rebuke and a gentle reminder that the apostles' role (like the role *he* had modeled on earth) was to desire to be in God's presence in prayer and worship and to faithfully follow the Father's sovereign lead.

LIFE APPLICATION

TRUSTING THE FATHER'S PLAN

The disciples wanted to know Jesus' timetable for the restoration of the kingdom. Like other Jews, the disciples chafed under their Roman rulers. They wanted Jesus to free Israel from Roman power and then become their king. Jesus replied that God the Father sets the timetable for all events—worldwide, national, and personal. If you want changes that God isn't making immediately, don't become impatient. Instead, trust God's timetable. Remember that he is wise, good, and all-powerful. Even when things seem chaotic, he is in control. His perfect will ultimately will prevail.

[1:7](#) He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority."^{NIV} Neither the *times* (chronous—referring purely to chronology) nor the *dates* (kaipous—more the character or circumstances of the era) were really any of the disciples' business. These are set by the Father's *authority*, and as far as the disciples were concerned, it was out of their jurisdiction. Later revelation through Paul and others would help clarify the issue (**[1 Thessalonians 5:1-2](#)**). What *should* concern and consume the disciples, however (notice the contrastive word "but" that begins **[1:8](#)**), was the loaded statement that follows.

[1:8](#) "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."^{NIV} This is the last recorded statement of Christ on earth. It is thus final, authoritative, and of utmost importance. The Holy Spirit is a major theme in Luke and Acts and is the major point of continuity between the life of Jesus and the ministry of the church.

Who is the Holy Spirit? God is three persons in one—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God became a man in Jesus so that Jesus could die for our sins. Jesus rose from the dead to offer salvation to all people through spiritual renewal and rebirth. When Jesus ascended into heaven, his physical presence left the earth, but he promised to send the Holy Spirit so that his spiritual presence would still be among mankind (see **[Luke 24:49](#)**). The Holy Spirit first became available to all believers at Pentecost (**[Acts 2](#)**). Whereas in Old Testament days the Holy Spirit empowered specific individuals for specific purposes, now all believers have the power of the Holy Spirit available to them. For more on the Holy Spirit, read **[John 14:16-28](#)**; **[Romans 8:9](#)**; **[1 Corinthians 12:13](#)**; and **[2 Corinthians 1:22](#)**.

LIFE APPLICATION

THE CHURCH'S VISION STATEMENT

- | The *people* for the task: *you*—those who know Christ, who listen to him
- | The *power* for the task: *the Holy Spirit*
- | The *philosophy* of approach to the task: *my witnesses*—say what you saw
- | The *plan* for the task: *to Jerusalem, Judea, to the ends*—begin where you are and move outward from there

Luke's Gospel emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of Christ. Luke continued that emphasis here as he focused on the Holy Spirit's role in the

early days of the church. The term "spirit" (pneuma) occurs nineteen times in Matthew, twenty-three times in Mark, thirty-six times in Luke, twenty-four times in John, and seventy times in Acts. Christ had just reminded his followers that they would soon receive the Holy Spirit ([1:5](#)). When the Spirit comes, he told his followers, *you will receive power. To do what? To be my witnesses.* Power from the Holy Spirit is not limited to strength beyond the ordinary; that power also involves courage, boldness, confidence, insight, ability, and authority. The disciples would need all these gifts to fulfill their mission.

LIFE APPLICATION

POWER SOURCE

Jesus promised the disciples that they would receive power to witness after they received the Holy Spirit. Notice the progression:

- (1) They would receive the Holy Spirit.
- (2) The Holy Spirit would give them power.
- (3) They would witness with extraordinary results.

Often we try to reverse the order and witness by our own power and authority. Witnessing is not showing what we can do for God. It is showing and telling others what God has done for us. When you tell others about Christ, rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. You can be a powerful witness.

The term "witness" (martures) provides remarkable insight into the nature of the disciples' task. A witness gives testimony based on what the witness knows, what he or she has seen—not hearsay, not rumor, not something someone else saw, but what *he* or *she* has experienced, seen, or heard. This witnessing theme is a repeated emphasis of the apostles' work—for example, see [2:32](#); [3:15](#); [5:32](#); [10:39](#); [13:31](#); [22:15](#). In effect, Jesus was saying to his followers: "There is going to be a period of witnessing by you about me between my two visits to your planet. Go out and tell people what you know—what you've seen, experienced, and learned. I'll be back."

They were to start right there in *Jerusalem* ([1:4](#)). *Judea* was the region surrounding Jerusalem (possibly including Galilee). *Samaria* was Judea's hostile next-door neighbor, a more difficult but equally important place to take the gospel. The "ends of the earth" is actually a singular form in Greek (eschatou), suggesting that perhaps the reference is to Rome or the Roman empire, the world power at that time. The direction was of primary importance: Beginning

from where you are at this moment, take the message of Christ outward, like ripples caused by a pebble thrown into a pond, not stopping at just your city or state but moving on beyond regional influence to the very "ends" of the earth. In other words, reach it *all!*

The disciples took Jesus at his word and went about their task exactly as he directed: they began in Jerusalem (1–7), spread to Judea and Samaria (8–12), then filtered out across the world to the imperial capital, Rome (13–28).

LIFE APPLICATION

AN EVER EXPANDING WITNESS

[Acts 1:8](#) describes the manner in which the gospel would spread geographically, from Jerusalem, into Judea and Samaria, and finally to the whole world. It would begin with devout Jews in Jerusalem and Judea, spread to the mixed race in Samaria, and finally be offered to Gentiles in the uttermost parts of the earth. God's gospel has not reached its final destination if someone in your family, your workplace, your school, or your community hasn't heard about Jesus Christ. How are you contributing to the ever expanding testimony of God's mercy and grace?

[1:9](#) When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.^{NRSV} After giving this important charge, Jesus was *lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight*. This cloud symbolized the glory of God. In the Old Testament, we read that a cloud led the Israelites through the wilderness ([Exodus 13:21-22](#)) and that God made his presence known to the people by appearing in a cloud ([Exodus 16:10](#); [19:9, 16](#); [24:15-18](#); [33:9-10](#); [34:5](#); [40:34-35](#)). A cloud also enveloped Jesus and three of his disciples at the Transfiguration ([Luke 9:34-35](#)) as a visible symbol of God's presence. So when Jesus returned to glory, he returned in a cloud that took him "out of their sight."

The disciples needed to see Jesus make this transition. The Ascension confirmed for them that Jesus truly was God. In addition, they witnessed the fact that he had physically left earth and had returned to his heavenly home; thus, the remaining work would be done by the witnesses he had left behind, operating in the power of the promised Holy Spirit.

[1:10-11](#) As they were straining their eyes to see him, two white-robed men suddenly stood there among them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why are you standing here staring at the sky? Jesus has been taken away from you into heaven. And someday, just as you saw him go, he will return!"^{NLT} While the

disciples were *straining their eyes*, staring into the sky, two angelic messengers appeared *among them*. The angels confirmed what had just happened: indeed, Jesus had been *taken away . . . into heaven*.

They also reminded the disciples of Jesus' promise: *Someday, just as you saw him go, he will return!* The question, of course, is what part of Jesus' departure will be reproduced upon his return: The cloud? The arrival on the Mount of Olives (see [1:12](#) and [Zechariah 14:4](#))?

The great thing is to be found at one's post as a child of God, living each day as though it were our last, but planning as though our world might last a hundred years.

C. S. Lewis

Most likely, it refers to Jesus' coming in a cloud to show his glory. In the Olivet discourse, Jesus had described his return: "At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" ([Luke 21:27](#) NIV; see also [Matthew 24:30](#); [Mark 13:26](#)). At his trial Jesus had told Caiaphas, "In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" ([Matthew 26:64](#) NIV).

LIFE APPLICATION

WORKING HARD UNTIL THE END

After forty days with his disciples ([1:3](#)), Jesus returned to heaven. The two men dressed in white (these were angels who appear to people in a humanlike form) proclaimed to the disciples that one day Jesus would return in the same way he had left—bodily and visibly. History is not haphazard or cyclical; it is moving toward a specific point—the return of Jesus to judge and rule over the earth. We should be ready for his sudden return ([1 Thessalonians 5:2](#)), not by standing around "staring at the sky" but by working hard to spread the Good News and help build Christ's church so that others will be able to share in God's great blessings.

There is no disputing the promise—Jesus is coming back, in a fashion similar to the way he departed that day. His followers would work in the power of the Spirit. They would walk out into the lost world, telling all they had seen and heard of the one whom they had watched ascend. Surely their attitude about the sky and clouds from that day on was never the same. Every tilt of their head

upward would recall the poignant moment of his ascent and remind them of the angelic promise of his return: "As you saw him go, he will return!"

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Acts.

2. Do you think it was hard for Jesus to convince people he had been dead during the 40 days after his resurrection that he was giving convincing proof that he was alive?

It appears that Jesus was appearing mainly to the disciples and other believers. The text does not say if Jesus appeared to people who did not believe in him at all, even though some who saw him alive still did not believe that he was alive. They were convinced that he had died. It was more difficult believing he was alive even though he was right there in front of them. Many thought Jesus was either a ghost or a figment of someone's imagination after the resurrection. That is why Jesus took the time to sit down and eat with the disciples. That's why he appeared to over 500 people at the same time.

3. Why do you think Jesus told the disciples to wait on the Holy Spirit in verse 4?

Jesus knew the task that he had for the disciples. He knew that they were not going to be able to handle it in their own strength. They were going to need a source of power to keep them from fleeing as they had fled at the time of the crucifixion. Jesus had already promised them before his death that He was going to send The Comforter" to help them get through life. He was making sure they would be in the right place at the right time to receive the promise.

4. When you hear the phrase baptized with the Holy Spirit, what comes to your mind?

Many people equate baptized with the Holy Spirit to mean speaking in tongues. To be baptized with water means you are showing outwardly a sign of death and resurrection. To be baptized with the Holy Spirit means that there is an inner change taking place in your life in which you seek to kill your old nature and rise to a new nature that is led by the Spirit of God. The evidence of being baptized

in the Holy Spirit is not the speaking in tongues, but in a powerful change in a person's life so that the person is changed to a new life.

5. What insight do we gain from verse 7 as to knowing when the world will end, or when Jesus will come back?

Jesus makes it clear, we are not to get caught up into charts and dates indicating when God is about to intervene in the world or when Jesus is to return. All predictions should go out the window because we are to be about the business of bringing people into the kingdom. Keep in mind that when Jonah prophesied that Ninevah would be destroyed in 40 days, because of the repentance of the people in the city, God postponed the destruction of the city. So even though Jonah had the 40 day period right as given to him by God, God would much rather see people moved to repentance than destroyed because of their sins.

6. What kind of power do you think Jesus is referring to in verse 8 when he says you will receive power when the Holy Spirit come on you?

Power from the Holy Spirit is not limited to strength beyond the ordinary; that power also involves courage, boldness, confidence, insight, ability, and authority. Jesus was preparing to equip the disciples with all of these traits. The same traits are available to us today.

7. Where are Christians lacking the most power today from your view point?

I think we lack power most in sharing the gospel message with others. We are not as bold in our witness for Christ. We have made our faith a private matter. We lack the power to take our faith to the world. Or we choose to limit the Spirit's power in that area.

8. If you were granted power in one area of your life, what would you like for it to be?

I'd like the power to share the message of Christ in such a way that people would be eager to get saved.

9. What do you think is the connection between receiving power, and being Jesus' witness throughout the earth?

Without the power, we are just sharing a philosophy of life that can't be that much different from other religious philosophies. It's the power of the Holy Spirit that allows us to continue in the face of ridicule, persecution, and suffering.

Acts 2 The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost

¹ When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues^[a] as the Spirit enabled them.

Acts 2:44-47 Today's New International Version (TNIV)

⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

10. Which power was more significant the weeks following Pentecost. The power to speak in tongues in Acts 2: 1-4 or the power to sell your possessions in acts of love in Acts 2:44-47? Why do you think so.

I think both we equally powerful. The disciples preached in languages that they did not understand, but people from other countries understand their languages perfectly. It would be like standing up at the beach and preaching in Russian only to discover that a group of Russians were at the beach. In the second situation, the holy Spirit moved in the hearts of the believers to remove

selfishness and greed from their hearts so that the church overflowed with love, joy and compassion for each other. This was a remarkable change.

Which of the two powers led to the growth of the church? In both incidents we see that the event caused the church to grow in number. Being a loving church can have the same impact as being a miracle working church.

11. Does a person have to speak in tongues as a proof of the sign of the Holy Spirit working in his or her life?

No. There is no record of Jesus speaking in tongues. Keep in mind the tongues spoken of at Pentecost, are not quite the same thing as the gift of tongues spoken in the church in which an interpreter is required. At Pentecost, the disciples were preaching to people in a tongue the disciples did not know, but the people they were speaking to did know. The people did not need an interpreter.

12. What then is the purpose of speaking in tongues in a believer's life?

Tongues are a chance for the believer to allow the Spirit to pray through them when they are not sure how to pray. Tongues are a means to pray, when the believer just do not have the words to say because of the depth of what he or she may be going through. Tongues are a gift to be used in the church to give a message to people in the church providing there is an interpreter.

13. What do you think God wants most out of you by equipping you with power from the Holy Spirit?

God wants me to live a changed life so that when others leave my presence, they will feel as though somehow they were in the presence of a man of God.

Lifesharing Lesson 2 What Makes A Great Father Luke 15:11-32

1. What three things do you think are important in being a great father?

A great Father is loyal to his family, putting the needs of the family above his own. A great father is strong in the face of difficulty and compassionate in the face suffering. A great father is loved by those around him.

2. How has fatherhood been devalued in our society?

Fathers are often portrayed as bumbling idiots in some shows who think they are in charge, but they are not. They are often portrayed as missing from the home. The male hero in movie often is able to attract several women to himself before the movie is over. Few movies show strong positive bonds between fathers and sons as something to be desired or coveted. The really cool guy is single and avoids all true long term commitments. There is little shame attached to fathering children and moving on to the next one. When women are devalued, fatherhood is devalued, because instead of being a protector, then man becomes an abuser.

3. Why do you think Jesus referred to God as My Father, more than any other term.

Jesus wanted to stress a live living relationship between people and God. He wanted people to have an intimacy with God. He wanted people to see that God was all powerful, yet full of compassion. He didn't want others seeing God as a distant figure that was not concerned about humanity as individuals. The term Father had a sense of connectedness as a family that would last. God was not a thing or simply a function, but an intimate being desiring a relationship with each of us.

[Luke 15:11-32](#)

Today's New International Version (TNIV) The Parable of the Lost Son

¹¹ Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

¹³ “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²² “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

²⁵ “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

²⁸ “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’ ³¹ “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

COMMENTARY

JESUS TELLS THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SON / [15:11-32](#) / [161](#)

The previous two parables—the one of lost sheep and the lost coin—build up to the climax, the parable of the lost son, a parable that is unique to Luke. Through

the parable of the lost son, Jesus presents a vivid illustration of God and his mercy for repentant sinners.

The parable describes the passion of a caring father for his runaway son. Day after day, the father had been scanning the horizons for any sign of his lost son. Although in the first century a father would typically wait until a son showed some sign of respect before addressing him, here the father threw all social conventions aside. He couldn't wait to see his son. He started walking toward him. With open arms, he embraced his son, pulling him tightly to himself.

God is like this loving father. He wants to welcome sinners back home with open arms. This parable is a picture of God's grace. Thank him for showing that type of compassion to you.

[15:11-12](#) To illustrate the point further, Jesus told them this story: "A man had two sons. The younger son told his father, 'I want my share of your estate now, instead of waiting until you die.' So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons."^{NLT} Jesus continued with another parable *to illustrate the point further*—that God rejoices when lost sinners repent and find forgiveness. *A man had two sons*, the younger of whom wanted his share of his father's *estate* (inheritance). This would have been one-third of the total estate, with the older son receiving two-thirds, a double portion of the other as prescribed by the law ([Deuteronomy 21:17](#)). In most cases the son would have received this at his father's death, although fathers sometimes chose to divide up their inheritance early and retire from managing their estates. What is unusual is that the younger son initiated the division of the estate. This showed arrogant disregard for his father's authority as head of the family.

[15:13-14](#) "A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and took a trip to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money on wild living. About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve."^{NLT} Within just *a few days*, the younger son was on his way—indicating that this had been his plan when he had asked for his inheritance in the first place. He *packed all his belongings* and got as far away from his family as possible, traveling *to a distant land*. The listeners would have understood that the young man had traveled outside Jewish territory, since he later ended up with pigs ([15:15-16](#))—animals Jews did not own because they were considered unclean. The young man apparently had wanted to live his own way, be his own master, get out from under the rules of his home and his father. Money was his ticket out, so he took it and ran.

In this distant land, he *wasted all his money on wild living*. Apparently this "wild" life and the freedom he thought went with it had also been part of his plan. So he lived on the wild side for a while, spending freely on whatever he chose. But then *his money ran out*. The inheritance, whatever amount it was, sustained him for a time, but it was not an endless supply. It dried up, and then, to make

matters worse, *a great famine swept over the land* and the boy did not even have money for food.

LIFE APPLICATION

YOUNG ADULTS

Young people need to plan for the future while they're still young. Two more years of school now, painful as it may appear, could mean a career they would not otherwise have. Plan for the unexpected even when your immediate needs seem immense. The young son in this story wasted his money just before a famine.

Thinking ahead is a Christian's duty, yet many treat it as a useless hindrance to moving on. Wild living may offer short-term thrills, but it's all a waste. Your treasure and time are God's gifts. Use them for him.

15:15-16 "So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything."^{NIV} The young man became so desperate that *he went and hired himself out to work for a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs*. According to Moses' law, pigs were unclean animals ([Leviticus 11:2-8](#); [Deuteronomy 14:8](#)). This meant that pigs could not be eaten or used for sacrifices. To protect themselves from defilement, Jews would not even touch pigs. For a Jew to stoop to feeding pigs would have been a great humiliation, and for this young man to desire to eat food that the pigs had touched was to be degraded beyond belief. The *Pods* were the seeds of the carob tree, which grows around the Mediterranean Sea. That *no one gave him anything* shows that he was neglected and insignificant; he had truly sunk to the depths.

15:17-19 "When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired men have food enough to spare, and here I am, dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, "Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired man."^{NLT} When reality finally hit him, the son *finally came to his senses*. Sitting among pigs that were better fed than he was, he reflected on life back home. He realized that at home *even the hired men have food enough to spare*. With no money, no dignity, and, so he thought, no claim to sonship in his father's household, he decided to go *home to [his] father*, confess his sin, and ask to be taken on *as a hired man*. At least there he would not go hungry.

While his motivation at first seems to have been his hunger, he could have saved his pride by never going back. He could have searched for a job as a hired hand anywhere (although his present experience showed him that not all hired hands were treated as well as those on his father's estate). He could have avoided his older brother's inevitable scorn over what he had done by staying away. Instead, this young man chose to go home. The key lies in the words that he planned to say to his father: *"I have sinned against both heaven and you."* He wanted to tell his father he was sorry. He wanted to repent of his selfishness that had sent him away and spent all the money that his father had set aside for his future. Even if it meant living as a hired man in his own home, he would return there in order to say these things to his father.

LIFE APPLICATION

COMING TO ONE'S SENSES

The younger son, like many who are rebellious and immature, wanted to be free to live as he pleased, and he had to hit bottom before he came to his senses. It often takes great sorrow and tragedy to cause people to look to the only one who can help them. For this young man, coming to his senses meant reconnecting his life to those who loved him. He had had his fill of individualistic adventure, and he realized his best prospect was to reconnect with family and friends.

Youth loves freedom and needs a growing portion of it. But youth needs family, friends, and community too—the solid base that provides identity and support. Are you trying to live your own way, selfishly pushing aside any responsibility or commitment that gets in your way? Stop and look before you hit bottom. You will save yourself and your family much grief. In your young adult years, reach high but keep connections strong.

15:20-21 "So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long distance away, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.'"^{NLT} The son *returned home to his father*, not knowing what to expect—the best he could anticipate was a cold shoulder, a halfhearted welcome, but in hopes of being hired to work for his father.

The father, however, seemed to have cast his eyes on the horizon many times since his son had left, hoping one day to see him returning. Finally, *his father saw him coming* even while he was far away. The father ran, embraced, and kissed his son. He was *filled with love and compassion* at the sight of his son

who had come home. For the patriarch of the family to run was to lose all caution and dignity. The father went beyond normal forgiveness and showed incredible love. The son began to give his father the speech he had prepared ([15:19](#)), but he didn't even get to the part about asking to be hired, for the father wanted to welcome his son back into his home with a grand celebration.

In the two preceding stories, the seeker actively looked for the sheep and the coin, which could not return by themselves. In this story, the father watched and waited. He was dealing with a human being with a will, but he was ready to greet his son if he returned. In the same way, God's love is constant and patient and welcoming. He will search and give people opportunities to respond, but he will not force them to come to him. Like the father in this story, God waits patiently for people to come to their senses.

This father's love and compassion picture the love God has always shown to his wayward people. The psalmist wrote:

As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him. ([Psalm 103:13](#) NIV)

Jeremiah the prophet wrote:

"So there is hope for your future," declares the LORD. "Your children will return to their own land. I have surely heard Ephraim's moaning: 'You disciplined me like an unruly calf, and I have been disciplined. Restore me, and I will return, because you are the LORD my God. After I strayed, I repented; after I came to understand, I beat my breast. I was ashamed and humiliated because I bore the disgrace of my youth.' Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight? Though I often speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I have great compassion for him," declares the LORD. ([Jeremiah 31:17-20](#) NIV)

Clearly God's love reaches out to sinners who, repenting of their sin, run to him for forgiveness. They can be assured of a warm welcome from the one who has been watching for them to come.

LIFE APPLICATION

ADMIT YOUR MISTAKES

When the wayward son returned home, he apologized to his father. Though his father loved him anyway, the son needed to apologize in order to heal his own relationship with his father. When you have offended someone, don't apologize indirectly or halfheartedly. Say it and mean it.

When you have made a mistake, don't blame bad luck or bad friends. Admit it, and prepare to go on.

When you are embraced by those you have hurt, don't refuse the forgiveness they offer. Guilt will ruin your recovery. When forgiven, accept the gift and let the past go.

[15:22-24](#) "But his father said to the servants, 'Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger, and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening in the pen. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.' So the party began."^{NLT} The father immediately restored this destitute and humbled young man as his son, directing the servant to bring *the finest robe* (generally given to a guest of honor), *a ring* (signifying authority, as a son, not a servant), *and sandals* (only slaves and the very poor went barefoot). Then the *calf* that was being fattened up for the time when a special feast should be prepared was to be killed—the father could think of no more fitting celebration. His son had been as good as *dead* to him but now had *returned to life*. He had been *lost* but now was *found*. As the shepherd celebrated upon finding the lost sheep ([15:6](#)), and the woman upon finding her lost coin ([15:9](#)), so this father celebrated at "finding" his "lost" son.

LIFE APPLICATION

FORGIVE AND FORGET

This father restored his wayward son and celebrated his return. In this reconciliation, the father absorbed the hurt and financial loss and was willing to adjust his hopes and dreams for his child. People are not perfect; your life will not unfold according to blueprints; your children will not develop according to your specifications. You can harbor resentment if you choose, but when it comes to relationships, that choice is always self-defeating.

Joy embraces others; stubbornness shuns them. Peace forgives others; pride prolongs the separation. Love cleans the slate of hurts recorded; self-pity smudges the record until nobody remembers who is at fault or why.

When the lost relationship is found, when apology is genuine, when reconciliation is sought, forgive and forget, absorb the loss and the cost, and let the party begin!

[15:25-27](#) "Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, and he asked one of the servants what was going on. 'Your brother is back,' he was told, 'and your father has killed the calf we were fattening and has prepared a great feast. We are celebrating because of his safe return.'"^{NLT} The elder brother, according to tradition, would have received a double inheritance. He probably had continued to be under his father's authority, working on the estate. While he would inherit it, this would not take place until his father's death. So he *was in the fields working*, being responsible to do the work that he should do, patiently following the typical plan for passing on the family inheritance. But as the verses below indicate, he also may not have been content with his situation; he just had not acted upon his desires as his brother had.

Imagine this other brother's surprise at returning from a day of hard work to the sound of a grand celebration going on in the house. Naturally he wondered *what was going on*. The servant simply replied with the facts—the wayward brother had returned, the calf had been killed, the feast had been prepared, and everyone was celebrating the brother's *safe return*.

[15:28-30](#) "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'"^{NIV} At the report of the news, the older brother *became angry and refused to go in* to join the celebration. The father's response is contrasted with the older brother's. The father forgave because he was filled with love. The son refused to forgive because he was bitter about what he saw as injustice. The older son's resentment rendered him just as lost to the father's love as his younger brother had been.

The older son was quite reasonable in his list of complaints. He reviewed his résumé and argued from experience. The father could have consented, pacifying his older son with additional gifts and rewards. But relationships prosper on love, not on fairness. Love is the dynamic that sweeps "reasonable claims" into secondary concerns here. When relationships need love, we often must let fairness take a second seat.

While the resentment of this older brother is easy to understand, his volley of words reveals the same sort of self-righteousness that afflicted the religious leaders of Jesus' day. The key to understanding this story is found in the context of [15:1-2](#). The younger son stands for the tax collectors and sinners, the waiting father is God, and the older brother represents the religious leaders. The younger son had lived as a notorious sinner, so the brother wanted nothing to do with him. Yet the loving father, who had gone out to meet his younger son, also *went out* to plead with his elder one. Instead of humbly accepting his

father's words, however, the older son let out a torrent of pent-up anger and frustration, describing that he had *been slaving* away for his father, never getting any special favors. He did not take a moment to understand that he would inherit everything that he was working for and that he was dearly loved by his father. He only felt angry that his father was celebrating "your son's" (not "my brother's") return home. Why should there be a celebration for an irresponsible person, when the model son got nothing comparable?

The religious leaders, ever claiming how hard they "slaved" for God, were attempting to keep myriad rules and regulations, many of which God never even demanded. They had the Father's love but had chosen to reject it in favor of hard work and self-denial. So when God eagerly welcomed the sinful, common people into the kingdom, the religious leaders were refusing to join the celebration. But God rejoiced that these sinful people had come "home," and he invited even these religious leaders to join the party. But they will retort with only anger and resentment that they who tried so hard should not get the party.

LIFE APPLICATION

YOUNGER BROTHERS

It was hard for the older brother to accept his younger brother when he returned, and it is just as difficult to accept "younger brothers" today. People who repent after leading notoriously sinful lives are often held in suspicion; churches are sometimes unwilling to admit them to membership. Instead, we should rejoice like the angels in heaven when an unbeliever repents and turns to God. Like the father in the parable, accept repentant sinners wholeheartedly and give them the support and encouragement that they need to grow in Christ.

[15:31-32](#) "His father said to him, 'Look, dear son, you and I are very close, and everything I have is yours. We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!'"^{NLT} The father spoke kindly to his overheated son; he explained that what the older son had been experiencing in the interim was far better than a one-day celebration. The older son had not been displaced as the firstborn—he had his relationship with his father (who obviously loved him very much), and he still had his inheritance. The younger son had squandered his and had gone through great suffering before coming to his senses. The wild life the younger son had sought had brought him only to ruin, and he returned home with no inheritance, humbled from having suffered some hard knocks. The older son needed to get his perspective, be grateful that he had not had to go through such pain, and

celebrate this happy day of his brother's safe return. The father repeated the words he had spoken to the servants—the younger son had been dead and was now alive; he had been lost and was found! The father got back his son; he wanted his elder son to rejoice at getting back his brother. This celebration was the right action to take—it was truly a joyful time in the life of this family.

Desperate sinners, notorious outcasts, difficult people—all have been offered salvation. God's people must not stand aside and above, but they must join in heaven's celebration when those who were lost have been found, when those who were "dead to sin [become] alive to God in Christ Jesus" ([Romans 6:11](#) NIV).

LIFE APPLICATION

NO PLACE FOR ANGER

In Jesus' story, the older brother represents the Pharisees, who were angry and resentful that sinners were being welcomed into God's kingdom. "After all," the Pharisees must have thought, "we have sacrificed and done so *much* for God." How easy it is to resent God's gracious forgiveness of others considered to be far worse sinners than oneself.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Luke.

4. Why do you think the father in the parable gave his younger son the money and let him go away with it?

The father knew his son's heart was not with him there in the house. He probably was looking for a long term relationship. He knew his son well enough to know that his son would have to learn some things the hard way. Letting his son go now, was probably the only way he could eventually win his son's heart. It was obvious the son did not appreciate all his father had done and was doing for him. It was a great insult for the son to ask of his father his future inheritance. Yet the father overlooked the insult, and let the son leave the house with the door being left open for him to return. If the father had blasted him when he left, it is unlikely that the son could have brought himself to return again, especially in disgrace.

5. Why does God allow us to go off and do foolish things?

God loves us, but God also knows the power of the human will. If we do not will to be with God, then even if we hang around the church, we will not be close to God. We will be as far away in our hearts as the person who does not profess to know God. God lets us find out that there are other masters out there in the world who are nowhere near as loving and gracious as God is. God wants our worship of Him to be out of our free will. Forced worship can never build the kind of intimacy in the relationship that God desires of us.

6. What did the younger son remember about the father he had left behind when things got rough for him?

He remembered that his father was honest, was generous with his workers, was compassionate toward those who were downtrodden, and was willing to forgive those who genuinely asked for it.

7. Why do you think the father didn't go check up on his son?

As much as the father loved his son, the father knew the choice to return home had to be made by the son himself. The son needed to make the decision to have a change on the inside of his heart. The father waited in order for the son to understand the mess he had created for himself. Bailing out another person is not always the best course of action to take. Sometimes we learn more when we are forced to live with the consequences of our actions.

8. What does this father do when his son returns home that we all seek after for ourselves?

The father shows an abundance of compassion, he demonstrates great love and affection, he eagerly offers forgiveness, and he seeks to shield his son from the attacks of others.

9. What does God do for us when we choose to turn away from our sin?

God offers us compassion, forgiveness, love and acceptance. He immediately restores us to a position in the family of God.

10. What did the older brother not understand about his father?

He did not understand how much a restored relationship meant to his father. The father delighted in seeing others being made whole and restored to the family. The father was more concerned with offering love and acceptance than he was in establishing what was fair and just for each situation. Twice the father said, “he was dead and has come back alive. The father saw possibilities for establishing a new relationship with his son. That relationship meant far more to him than the property his son had squandered away or the insults he had endured from his younger son.

11. What are some example of times we become jealous of what God has done for others, but God has not done for us?

There can be jealousy on all kinds of level. We can be jealous of the prayers God answers for others concerning the birth of a child, a spouse, a healing, a job, a home, a position or a talent. We can be jealous of another church, another ministry, or the way God uses another person. We can be like the older son, who has been in church serving for years, only to see someone come in off the streets and is immediately granted the very prayer request we have been praying for for years yet have not received a yes to our prayer.

12. How do we know the father loved his older son?

The older son would have had the place of honor at the banquet given by his father. It was an insult to his father to decline to attend the banquet. Yet the father overlooked the insult and anxiously pursued his eldest son. He affirmed his love for the older son by trying to break down any barrier between the two of

them. He could have ordered his son into the party or threatened the son with the loss of his inheritance but he does not. He reaches out in love trying to get his son to see that he would everyone reconciled to each other. Here was a chance for their family to be united again.

13. How much of a role does overlooking an insult play in the role of being a good father?

It is very important because the good father may have to be the initiator in reconciling the relationship. A good father may have to look beyond the hurt and the anger to discover the real cause of the pain.

14. What do we learn about God from the life of the father in this passage?

We learn that God is merciful, forgiving, compassionate, waiting for us, generous, willing to take the first step, eager to receive, interested in broken relationships, eager to lift us up and loving us even when we do not deserve it.

1. Which graduation or promotion that you experienced was the most difficult or most enjoyable for you?

My graduation from seminary was the most enjoyable one for me. I was finally going to be doing what I had wanted to do for years and that was pasturing a church. At the time I was thinking it was my last graduation from a school setting.

2. What do we lose at each graduation or promotion that we experience either in school or on the job?

We lose the chance to be a part of some people's lives, because graduations and promotions are like forks in the road. We go off in one direction and others go off in a different direction. We often lose what's familiar to us, and begin to take on challenges that we have not had before. We often lose the intimacy we once shared with friends and colleagues. We also lose a certain standard of living?

3. How can we tell when we are being promoted or are experiencing a graduation in our spiritual lives?

We notice a desire to rid ourselves of certain things in our lives that clutter our lives or limit our time to be available to be used by God. We start letting go of things that are not necessarily sin, but they are distractions. We can feel uncomfortable saying or doing things that did not really bother us before. We find ourselves seeking God's will more for our lives. We become conscious of seeking to discover God's way of handling our issues. Others will tell us, there's something different about us. Some people will even begin to shy away from us or become more conscious of their behavior or language when they are in our presence.

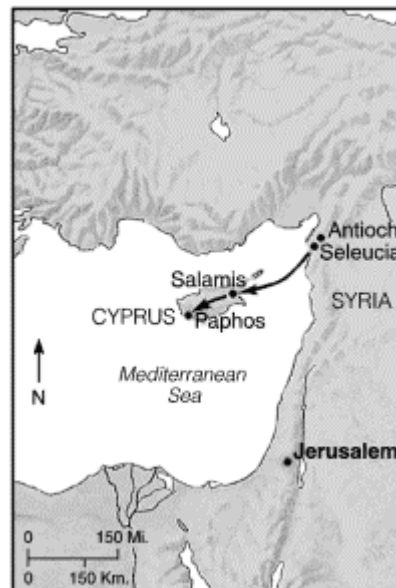
¹ Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

Commentary Material

13:1 Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the ruler, and Saul.^{NRSV} The *church at Antioch* became the sending center of the mission to reach the world (the last part of Jesus' commission in **1:8**). This first verse gives us an idea of its truly international makeup and of the broad spectrum of people who were being reached by the gospel.

Until this point it appeared that Barnabas and Paul had been the principle teachers in the church of Antioch (**11:26**). This list shows, at least, these three others who were said to have had the gifts of being *prophets and teachers*. It is unclear as to whether these men had one or the other or both of these gifts. *Barnabas* appears first on the list because he was likely the leader of the group. *Simeon* had a Latin nickname, *Niger*—which means "black-skinned"—probably because of his dark complexion. There is some speculation

that this was the same Simon of Cyrene who carried the cross of Christ (**Mark 15:21**), but that is unknown. The next name on the list is a man from *Cyrene* by the name of *Lucius*. Cyrene was in North Africa. Lucius was probably among the Cyprian and Cyrenian men who first preached the gospel to Gentiles in Antioch (see **11:20-21**). The fourth individual was *Manaen* (whose name means "comforter"). He was involved at the highest levels of government, as he was *a member of the court of Herod the ruler*. How ironic that one of the church leaders was a member of Herod's court!



Ministry in Cyprus

The leaders of the church in Antioch chose Paul and Barnabas to take the gospel westward. Along with John Mark, they boarded ship at Seleucia and set out across the Mediterranean for Cyprus. They

preached in Salamis, the largest city, and went across the island to Paphos.

Saul was a highly trained rabbinic Jew and a Roman citizen. His name closes the list of this very diverse group. He may have been listed last because he was the newest believer or possibly because he was, at this point, the second most important person on the list (in Greek, sometimes the two most important words of a sentence are placed at the first and last positions in a sentence). Whatever the case, Saul would not be in the background much longer.

The social, geographic, and racial variety of these people shows that the Spirit of God had been moving rapidly and over a broad geographic area. Not only had the Good News spread to these areas, but the Spirit of God used cosmopolitan Antioch to put together a diverse team for the next "phase" of kingdom expansion.

LIFE APPLICATION

A HUMAN PATCHWORK

Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, Saul—what variety is found in God's church! These five men were from different cultural and, likely, racial backgrounds. It's reasonable to assume that they had different skills, ages, appearances, personalities, likes, and dislikes. The common thread among them was their deep faith in Christ. We must never exclude anyone whom Christ has called to follow him. One sign that we are in God's will is when our churches are filled with a patchwork of radically different people who are united by the love of Christ.

[13:2-3](#) While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.^{NIV} The believers *were worshiping the Lord and fasting* when God sent them a special message. Just as both Peter and Cornelius received messages while praying (**[chapter 10](#)**), so God spoke to these believers as they were seeking him. "Fasting" means going without food for a specified period of time in order to focus on the Lord. People who are fasting can set aside the time of preparing and eating meals and use it to worship and pray. Also, their hunger pangs will remind them of their complete dependence upon God (see also **[2 Chronicles 20:3](#)**; **[Ezra 8:23](#)**; **[Esther 4:16](#)**; **[Matthew 6:16-18](#)**).

The Spirit spoke—possibly through one of the members of this group (there were prophets among them—**[13:1](#)**). The Spirit told them to *set apart . . . Barnabas*

and Saul. The word for "set apart" is *aphorizo*. It is used to describe three important events in Paul's life: (1) his birth ([Galatians 1:15](#)); (2) his conversion ([Romans 1:1](#)); and (3) here, his sending to the Gentile mission field. Because God *called them to the work*, they had his blessing from the start.

The laying on of hands was a symbolic act that indicated public recognition of calling and ability as well as the association of a particular congregation with a ministry. The roots of the practice are found in the Old Testament, where it was used to set someone aside for an office ([Numbers 27:23](#)), bless someone ([Genesis 48:14](#)), or dedicate something to God ([Leviticus 1:4](#)). The church at Antioch was identifying itself with these two men and with their mission.

Even after the Spirit had spoken and the choice had been made, there was more prayer and fasting before the congregation endorsed these two to the task at hand. With that, they *sent them off*.

PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY / [13:4-12](#)

Having been chosen by God to embark on what came to be called the "first missionary journey," Paul and his entourage (Barnabas and John Mark, at the very least) set sail. The target of this evangelistic thrust was the Gentile population of Asia Minor. The mission stopped first on the island of Cyprus, where they confronted a false prophet named Bar-Jesus. Twice in this short narrative, the Holy Spirit is mentioned so as to demonstrate the truth that the spread of the gospel is God's idea and can only be done in and by the Spirit's power.

Why did Paul and Barnabas go where they did? The Holy Spirit led them. They followed the communication routes of the Roman Empire—this made travel easier. They first visited Barnabas's home country. Then they visited key population and cultural centers to reach as many people as possible.

[13:4](#) Sent out by the Holy Spirit, Saul and Barnabas went down to the seaport of Seleucia and then sailed for the island of Cyprus.^{NLT} The *Holy Spirit* was the central force in sending *Saul and Barnabas* (along with John [Mark—13:5](#)) on their journey. For more on the theology of the Holy Spirit in Acts, see commentary in [chapters 1](#) and [2](#). *Seleucia* was a seaport of Antioch, a few miles north of the city at the mouth of the Orontes River. *Cyprus*, an important island in the Mediterranean, was about one hundred miles to the southwest.

LIFE APPLICATION

BEING A MISSIONARY AT HOME

Saul, Barnabas, and John Mark sailed to Cyprus ([13:4](#)). Located in the

Mediterranean Sea, the island of Cyprus (with a large Jewish population) was Barnabas's home. Perhaps the Spirit of God led the missionaries to familiar territory to underline the truth that if a person's Christianity isn't believable at home, then there's no sense taking it on the road. This was also the pattern established by Christ in [Acts 1:8](#). We must share Christ first where we are, with those who know us best. Credibility and effectiveness at home are prerequisites to more elaborate outreach endeavors. As one wise old saint noted, it takes more than a trip to some faraway locale to make someone into a missionary.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Acts.

4. How do you think the Holy Spirit spoke in verse 2?

I think since there were prophets in the church, one of the prophets probably spoke in the fashion that the Old Testament prophets spoke. It is unlikely that they simply heard a voice out of the heavens as when Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration and they heard an audible voice from heaven. In other places in Acts, we find God speaking to people during times of prayer, but it was in the form of a vision taking place.

5. If God had said to set Paul and Barnabus apart, why do you think they fasted and prayed before sending them off?

Even when God is clear on the direction a person should take, that does not mean that road is going to be one of smooth sailing. We still need to fast and pray because of the challenges that are going to come up. Once we know the direction we are to go, Satan also will know, and he will set up traps and ambushes along the way.

6. If the Holy Spirit spoke in our church and said that you and another person was to be set aside to do a special work for God, what vision would you have of what God was going to do through the two of you?

I'd think that the Lord was about to do something to start a new ministry that was going to be very successful.

7. What can go right for you when you are promoted or graduate?

You can move to a higher level. You can get a great job. You can obtain a raise. You can start living out a dream on another level.

8. What can go wrong for you when you are promoted or graduate?

You can have a hard time adjusting to your work assignment or new school. You can have a hard time finding a job that you have spent years preparing for. You can find yourself in a hostile environment with very difficult teachers or supervisors.

9. Paul and Barnabus will face opposition to their preaching, they will be kicked out a city, they will become the target of assassins, they will be abused, Paul will be stoned, and one of their co-workers will abandon them. What can we learn from this when God lifts us up to another level through promotion or graduation.

God's promotions are not necessarily about our comfort and convenience. They may involve paying a high price in order for others to be able to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christians are never promised a life of ease by getting into the will of God. It is a myth, that once we discover God's will for our lives, we can forget about suffering and pain. God clearly set Paul and Barnabus apart for this mission that caused them a lot of physical suffering, grief, and pain. It got so bad that John Mark decided to leave them and go back home.

Acts 15:36-41 Today's New International Version (TNIV) Disagreement Between Paul and Barnabas

³⁶ Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." ³⁷ Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, ³⁸ but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. ³⁹ They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, ⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹ He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Commentary Material

PAUL AND BARNABAS SEPARATE / [15:36-41](#)

When the time came for a second missionary journey, Barnabas and Paul had a sharp disagreement concerning John Mark. Barnabas wanted to take this young man, his nephew, but Paul refused, citing John Mark's desertion during the first evangelistic endeavor.

This incident demonstrates the sovereignty of God as two missionary teams were formed: Paul and Silas, and Barnabas and Mark. Even though no further word is given regarding the results of Barnabas and Mark's evangelistic efforts, we see kingdom messengers departing Antioch in two directions.

[15:36](#) After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Come, let us return and visit the believers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they are doing."^{NRSV} Paul wanted to take another trip, primarily to revisit the churches that had been established on the first missionary journey. Evangelism would prove to be a major component of Paul's mission, but establishing and equipping the *believers in every city* seem to have been his primary objectives (see [Ephesians 4:11-12](#)).

LIFE APPLICATION

MINISTRY PRIORITIES

Paul never lost his great burden to preach the gospel ([Romans 1:15](#); [15:20](#); [1 Corinthians 1:17](#); [9:16](#); [Galatians 2:2](#)). At the same time, however, he maintained a pastor's concern for the growth of his converts. Ministry is not *either* evangelism *or* edification; it is *both*.

Christians have a dual role—to be both spiritual obstetricians and spiritual pediatricians. We help others become "born again" ([John 3:3](#)), and we aid them in growing up spiritually ([1 Peter 2:2](#)). We may have strengths in one area or the other, but like Paul, we should keep both goals in view.

[15:37-38](#) Barnabas agreed and wanted to take along John Mark. But Paul disagreed strongly, since John Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not shared in their work.^{NLT} The grand plan of Paul and Barnabas to launch a follow-up campaign quickly unraveled when the topic of *John Mark* came up. The men disagreed over the inclusion of this young believer on another missionary trip. Paul adamantly did not want to take him along. Because he had *deserted* them on the first journey ([13:13](#)), Paul felt that he would be an unreliable person to have along. The debate between the old colleagues became heated—they *disagreed strongly*.

Why John Mark deserted has been a subject of great debate. He may have simply been homesick. He may have become afraid due to the opposition of certain parties to the gospel message. He may have intended to accompany Paul and Barnabas only as far as Pamphylia and had simply failed to communicate this fact.

Nevertheless, despite Mark's previous behavior, Barnabas saw great potential in this young man. Barnabas, the "encourager," as his name means, used that gift in developing this young man into someone who eventually would serve the church well, writing the Gospel of Mark as well as becoming a valuable help to Paul himself (see [Colossians 4:10](#); [2 Timothy 4:11](#)).

[15:39](#) Their disagreement over this was so sharp that they separated. Barnabas took John Mark with him and sailed for Cyprus.^{NLT} Barnabas and Paul's *disagreement was so sharp* that they ended up separating. Each formed his own missionary team. *Barnabas took John Mark* and sailed west to *Cyprus*. These two are not mentioned again in the book of Acts.

It is important to note that the disagreement was not about theology. Both men would continue to teach the true gospel message. Through this disagreement God doubled the missionary effort.

LIFE APPLICATION

AGREEING TO DISAGREE

The disagreement over John Mark caused Paul and Barnabas to form separate ministry teams, opening up two missionary endeavors instead of

one. Paul and Barnabas did not break fellowship or become bitter over this issue—Paul would later speak highly of Barnabas ([1 Corinthians 9:6](#)) and eventually be fully reconciled with Mark ([Colossians 4:10](#)). Here is a good reminder that God is able to work through our conflicts and disagreements. We will not always agree with our Christian brothers and sisters, but problems can sometimes be solved by working out agreements and letting God work.

[15:40-41](#) Paul chose Silas, and the believers sent them off, entrusting them to the Lord's grace. So they traveled throughout Syria and Cilicia to strengthen the churches there.^{NLT} Paul's second missionary journey, this time with *Silas* as his partner, began approximately three years after his first one ended. The two visited many of the cities covered on Paul's first journey, plus others. This journey would lay the groundwork for the church in Greece.

Silas had been involved in the Jerusalem council; he was one of the two men chosen to represent the Jerusalem church by taking the letter and decision back to Antioch ([15:22](#)). Paul, from the Antioch church, chose Silas, from the Jerusalem church, and they traveled together to many cities to spread the Good News. This teamwork demonstrated the church's unity after the decision at the Jerusalem council.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Acts.

10. Paul and Barnabus become very close friends and are true brothers in Christ who want to do the will of God. Yet their promotion of working together is going to bring them into conflict with each other. John Mark had abandoned them when things got really tough. Paul didn't think it wise to take him on the next missionary journey. Barnabus wanted to give John Mark another chance. They had a very sharp disagreement over this and split up with Barnabus taking Mark with him and Paul taking Silas with him. Do you think God calls ministries to separate and break up, and if so why would God do it?

I believe God has seasons for our lives, for our churches, and for our ministries. Sometimes the only way we can develop further is to leave where we are and accept responsibilities somewhere else. The breakup or separation of a ministry or team can be God's way of expanding the kingdom of God. Obviously more places were reached by Paul and Barnabus as two separate teams than could have been reached by them together. Keep in mind that God was using Paul and Barnabus apart from each other before they did their missionary work together. Every human partnership that is started, is one day going to be parted.

11. When a person or family leaves a church, how can we tell if it was a promotion or not?

We tell it by seeing if the person or family is growing in their service to the kingdom and growing spiritually in their personal lives. Sometimes a person needs a break from all the activities they may have been involved in at a previous church. So just measuring the amount of activities a person is now involved in is not an indication of growth. A sign of spiritual healing may be a time of rest from activity, and more time spent meeting God.

12. When is it time for a person to leave a church? How should they leave?

It's time for a person to leave the church when they are dissatisfied and can no longer actively and positively support the leadership of the church. If a person is sowing seeds of gossip or destruction, it's time to go. They should leave by informing the pastor they are leaving and giving an honest reason as to why they are leaving even though it may be painful to hear.

2 Timothy 4:11 Today's New International Version (TNIV)

¹¹ Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.

13. Paul and John Mark were eventually reconciled to each other. Why do you think that was possible?

Paul probably avoided attacking John Mark personally, and John Mark probably avoided trying to destroy Paul's character and reputation. They left on terms in which all bridges were not destroyed. They also both wanted what was best for the kingdom of God.

14. How should a church respond to members who left and then later decide to return?

The church should have an open door policy. If the person left in a vicious manner and has not offered an apology, the church should be aware that a wolf

might be coming back into the fold. When there is repentance, a fresh start is part of what we offer as believers.