



# FOLLOWING THE SPIRIT

DISCIPLE-MAKING, CHURCH-PLANTING  
and MOVEMENT-BUILDING TODAY

INSIGHTS FROM THE BOOK OF ACTS

PETER ROENNFELDT

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“Following the Spirit looks at the Book of Acts through 21st-century eyes. The Roman world of the first century was as hostile to the Christian message as the world is today. Peter Roennfeldt highlights the simple reproducible processes that New Testament believers used to make disciples and plant churches—a movement that exploded across the Roman world. He points us to a promising future for a Christian movement in a hostile world.”—Leigh Rice, discipleship team leader

“It is not a surprise that Following the Spirit would come out of the pen of someone who has devoted his life to following the Spirit as described in the Bible and especially in the book of Acts. Practical applications for today are at every corner and thought-provoking questions will flare the passion for experiencing the transforming power of the Spirit now.”  
—Danijela Schubert, theologian and church administrator

“Meticulously researched and engagingly readable, Following the Spirit draws us from the biblical into our contemporary world. The complexity of the 21st-century world will resist any evangelistic endeavour less than a God-directed, Holy Spirit-empowered model that Following the Spirit provides.”—Rex D Edwards, theologian and author of *Every Believer a Minister* (1979) and *Every Believer the Church* (2013)

“Christianity and the Church have been shaken. Youth and young adults are struggling to live out their faith and to see a Church that has relevance beyond the ‘four walls’. Following the Spirit is practical and simple, yet transformational. At this critical time, it breathes life into our understanding of what it means to ‘be the church’ and is a compelling call to be a disciple-making movement of Jesus Christ. We have been personally inspired, blessed and challenged by Peter’s Spirit-driven and down-to earth teaching.”—Alina and Martin van Rensburg, multiplying young adult missional leaders, Queensland

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# Getting Started

Acts is one of the most exciting books in the Bible. It is inspiring and compelling, but also disturbing and challenging. It chronicles major transitions. The era of the Spirit is ushered in. God's Word is reinterpreted. The author Luke had no interest in the superficial. Together with the triumphs, he unashamedly reported the foibles, failures, sin, struggles and conflicts of the early church. He grappled with what it meant to be resilient, counter-cultural disciples in a toxic oppressive environment. And through his writing, the Holy Spirit captures us for a radical life of active disciple-making, cutting-edge evangelism and church multiplication.

Luke was inspired. He had not met Jesus on the Damascus road like Paul, but Luke knew Him. His writing reflects intimate fellowship with Jesus and the Spirit. As we read, we will be refreshed, invigorated and empowered by the Spirit's presence. Luke was not aware that we would read his letter—but the Spirit certainly was!

As you read this book, read and re-read Acts. Do it in one sitting. It was first read this way. Then, as you come to each Phase and Guide in this book, read the chapter and verses from Acts on which it is based. The structure of this book reflects the phases of Jesus' ministry and movement-building from heaven—following His ascension.

## Journal your discoveries

Dig deep with the Application for Today questions. We have included a small space after each question for you to record your own responses, thoughts and feelings. But for a full and deeper experience with this book, we suggest you follow the habit of journaling your discoveries.

To do this, use a notebook—it might be a good-quality journal or a cheap

notepad—or you might open a new document on your computer or tablet. Record what you discover, see, experience and care about. Writing will convert a jumble of ideas into coherent insights, values and action plans. It helps clarify which ideas and actions will be most important to you.

## Share this experience

Invite friends, neighbours or colleagues to join you. The structure of this book provides a perfect frame for regular small-group discussions. In preparation, each person reads a Guide—reflecting, journalling and perhaps sharing comments via social media; then the group meets in a café, office or home, to share and apply key discoveries.

Discovery Bible Reading provides an alternative approach to these discussions. When your group gets together, pause to pray: “Dear God, please guide us as we read today. Thank you. Amen.” Have one person read the section of Acts that you will focus on and another re-read it, before one tells the story in their own words. Then, with the experiences of the early believers clearly in mind—and with the background of reading this book—use these five questions as the basis for discussion:

1. What is new to us?
2. What surprises us?
3. What do we not understand?
4. What will we each obey or apply to our lives this week?
5. What might we share with another—and with whom?

Who will you invite to join you on this journey? Who would you like to see grow as resilient followers of Jesus? Share this experience of Following the Spirit with them. Be part of the Spirit’s movement of resilient disciples.



RESILIENT DISCIPLES NEEDED

# RESILIENT DISCIPLES NEEDED

Our world is a hostile environment for disciples of Jesus Christ. Religion is on the rise, but the patterns are complex.<sup>1</sup> The global south—the developing nations of Africa, Asia, central and south America—are experiencing an aggressive expansion of Christianity, often demanding and in tension with other world religions. By contrast, the global north societies of Europe, north America, Australia and New Zealand—once shaped by Christian faith—are now largely post-Christian, with caustic, corrosive cultures that undermine faith and commitment.

To survive and thrive in such environments, Mark Sayers, author of *Disappearing Church*, concludes, “We need extremophile disciples—disciples who are resilient.”<sup>2</sup> Extremophiles—from the Latin *extremus*, “extreme” and the Greek *philia*, “love”<sup>3</sup>—are life forms that thrive in physical or geochemical conditions detrimental to most others.

## Early Christians were extremophiles

With everything against them, early believers not only survived, but thrived. They followed the Spirit in replicating and expanding the disciple-making ministry of Jesus, cultivating a counter-cultural movement of church-planting in the most extreme conditions.<sup>4</sup> What Jesus did on earth—as recorded in the gospels—was continued from heaven through His

Spirit-filled disciples, as outlined in Acts.

In this book, we follow their journey with the Spirit. It is challenging and disturbing, compelling us to consider the impact Jesus' methods might have if implemented today. Their experiences speak to our circumstances and issues, reshaping and transforming our concept of mission, inspiring and cultivating the resilience needed today.

## It was “what Jesus started”<sup>5</sup>

Even with His promise—“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you”—the vision Jesus cast for His followers was daunting: “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). It seemed impossible, as it does still today.

However, Luke demonstrated that Jesus' vision could become reality. He structured his book<sup>6</sup> around Jesus' vision of expanding circles of witness. Jesus promised the Spirit (chapters 1-2) to empower:

- Witness in Jerusalem and Judea Chapters 3–7
- Disciple-making among Samaritans and gentiles 8–10
- Church multiplication to the ends of the earth 11–20
- The release of multiplying movements 19–28

Jesus prepared His disciples for this task, demonstrating reproducible processes. Then, on the evening of resurrection day, He said, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21). Days later, on a mountain in Galilee, He commissioned them: “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

In broad strokes, the expanding witness of His disciples as His body (the church) reflects the successive phases of Jesus' life and ministry on earth—preparation, foundations, participation, leadership multiplication, and movements (as illustrated in the diagram on the next page).

In Acts, Luke selects experiences to illustrate the obedience of early believers to Jesus' commission, demonstrating that their message and methods were shaped by Jesus' life, disciple-making and movement-

building.<sup>7</sup>

Luke's record is illustrative of a wider movement. By the fourth century, an estimated 8.4 per cent of the population of the Roman Empire—perhaps 5 million people—were believers.<sup>8</sup> Rodney Stark suggests more than 50 per cent were Christians by the middle of that century.<sup>9</sup> And the witness of believers was not limited to the western, European Roman Empire, they also reached out across Asia and Africa.<sup>10</sup> Movements do not depend on any one person. They are predicated on a spirit of sacrifice, releasing others to take over.

## Their world and ours

While vastly different, there are surprising correlations between the Graeco-Roman world of the first centuries and our mission environments.

### A la carte spirituality

As with an a la carte menu, in the New Testament world there were many gods and combinations from which to choose. Gods for lovers, poets, bakers, farmers, travellers; gods to guard doorways and gods of the beehive; gods of war, fire, the underworld and the dead; gods of the home and healing. In farmhouses, small urban flats and luxury homes, space was devoted to these deities. Temples were integral to culture, art and civic pride—even attracting tourists.<sup>11</sup>

Today there is also a proliferation of spirituality. Temples, shrines and sacred objects adorn cities, homes and gardens in the global south and north, with rituals celebrated in forest and mountain grottos. Few in our communities are devoid of spirituality.

We can learn from the witness of early believers. They adapted Jesus' methods of disciple-making to their secular but spirituality soaked world.

### Syncretism and pluralism<sup>12</sup>

The early church shared Jesus in a world of nymphs, gods, spirits and

demons. Luke tells fascinating stories of the supernatural, even a bonfire of magical texts and paraphernalia—with an estimated value of 50,000 pieces of silver (Acts 19:19)—used by Christian believers. “Such a colossal figure implies a large number of Ephesian believers with an enormous investment in the dark arts.”<sup>13</sup>

The presence of diviners, exorcists, and practitioners of magic is not unfamiliar to us. New Age and neo-pagan spirituality is sold with good coffee and healthy food in the global north and south. Luke’s record in Acts speak to our syncretistic context. The popularity of Harry Potter and his ilk, proliferation of movies and TV shows with supernatural themes, and fascination with spiritual realms, would not have surprised early Christians.

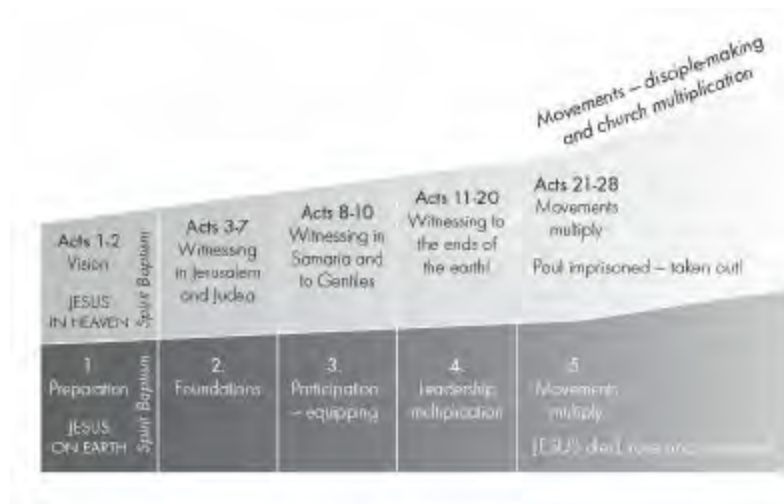
### Schism in the church

The early church wrestled with the evils of racism, nationalism, tribalism, sexism, religious taboos and fundamentalism—each threatening to devastate its unity. Today the church is divided, and has been for centuries. One impact of the Protestant Reformation was fragmentation into many churches or denominations, and within all are tensions similar to those confronted by the early church.

Even within church communities, migration creates challenges rarely discussed. As churches in the global north welcome Christians migrating from the south, rejoicing that they no longer face extinction and that their buildings are attracting people again, tensions are never far away. Conflicts arise over ways of life, diverse social expectations, cultural understandings, traditions, demands, taboos, worship practices and theological perspectives.

In north and south, local churches, denominations, theology and ecclesiological agendas are shaped and reshaped by vastly different traditions and differing social, gender and community expectations. The threats of schism in Acts speak directly to some of these issues. Like us, they wrestled with purity laws, gender equality, sexual diversity, food offered to idols, holy days and festivals, racial and tribal tensions,

inclusion and exclusion.



## Tough mission environments

In the global north, we are confronted with a “very tough form of paganism.” It is “a paganism born out of the rejection of Christianity”—a post-Christian rather than “pre-Christian paganism.”<sup>14</sup> This is also seen in the south where multiple millions have tried Christianity but then backslidden and moved on.

Mission among post-Christian pagans<sup>15</sup>—people who have moved on from Christian faith—demands the focus, sacrifice and resilience of pre-Constantine, pre-Christendom disciples and churches.<sup>16</sup>

Much changed with Constantine. Great persecution under successive emperors had not halted Christianity’s growth; rather, it had strengthened believers. In the face of suffering and death, standing true and sharing faith made for resilient disciples. As a result, Constantine—emperor of the west, with Licinius of the east—was forced to face the reality of Christianity’s spread.<sup>17</sup> In their two-man summit in Milan in January, 313, they therefore changed the status of Christianity. Their “Edict of Tolerance” guaranteed Christians “full religious freedom” with the result that everyone and anyone could be a Christian. Rodney Stark sees this as Constantine’s response to the growth of Christianity;<sup>18</sup> and David Wright observes, “The transition to the era of the ‘Christian Empire’ had begun.”<sup>19</sup>

Having been granted status within the Roman political system and gifted

lavish basilicas with priests, Christianity became a privileged public religion. Christians no longer needed to stand up for their faith and, in time, Christianity's voice became dominant, controlling, even imposed on society.

Of course, times of Reformation tempered its voice, but the resulting fragmented denominationalism has reinforced the perception of a pagan Christianity<sup>20</sup> intent on control, manipulation and its own self-interests.

In the global north, we have seen its collapse, with its loss of spiritual and political influence, authority and respect.<sup>21</sup> But the vested interests of Christendom do not surrender lightly. It is experiencing a revival in the global south—and migrating north.<sup>22</sup>

Resilient disciples are needed for this post-Christendom season in the global north, as well as in global south mission environments where the faithful can be overwhelmed by masses backsliding from faith, as well as a resurgence of brutal, nasty forms of Christendom. Sharing Jesus, persuading people to become disciples and remaining true to Him is now much tougher in both the north and south.

## Luke wrote for us<sup>23</sup>

Luke would not have imagined his letters, comprising a quarter of our New Testament,<sup>24</sup> being downloaded onto smart phones and tablets in a myriad of translations to be read in cultural contexts so vastly different from his. But he knew his letters would be read widely, first aloud to Theophilus with others listening. Carefully researched and structured, such important letters “were valued and shared.”<sup>25</sup>

A first-century gentile doctor and convert to Jesus, Luke wrote to Theophilus, perhaps a Roman official, maybe a convert and his patron. While his name meant “loved by God”—thus, a representative of all Christians—Luke addressed him as “most excellent,” indicating a higher social status than himself<sup>26</sup> (Acts 1:1, compare Luke 1:3).

Luke might have employed a professional scribe, which was how writing was done in those days. While educated people could read aloud, their

writing skills were typically rudimentary. As many as 10 per cent of people could read, but far fewer could write.<sup>27</sup> However, the language used in Acts is that of a “cultured person,”<sup>28</sup> reflecting Luke’s own education, as well as that of any scribe he chose.

His writing also reflects thorough research: a detailed knowledge of key sites, discussions with main players, interviews with primary witnesses. He travelled with Paul, and during Paul’s two-year imprisonment in Caesarea Maritima, Luke had time to visit Judea and Galilee. He no doubt talked with the leaders in Jerusalem, including Peter, James the brother of Jesus, perhaps Barnabas and John Mark. In Caesarea, he might have spent time with Philip and his daughters, as well as Cornelius and members of his household. And finally, Luke took the dangerous journey to Rome with Paul, suffering shipwreck with him and encouraging him during his final imprisonment.

Perhaps Luke kept notes, organising them as he developed his theme. He might have discussed the structure with his scribe. The letter would have gone through several revisions, each read aloud to him by his scribe or another educated in rhetoric. Such a writing project was expensive.<sup>29</sup> Set fees were paid for each character and line. When completed, a copy was needed—and then there was the cost of dispatching the letter. Perhaps other believers assisted Luke with the expenses of this important task.

## Chapter 29

Like Luke’s gospel, Acts has no formal conclusion. There is another chapter to be written—Chapter 29. This book, *Following the Spirit*, is not a call to return to an imagined glorious past. There can be no retreat. We are to move forward. Disciple-making is now to be done in tough pagan, post-Christian and next-Christendom environments. This is where Jesus has called us!

Neil Cole suggests a “software upgrade” for this next chapter of mission.<sup>30</sup> The Jerusalem church was the original Church 1.0, with Antioch being Church 1.1, the Galatian churches 1.2, and Corinth a change to 1.3. Constantine’s taking the church “from the margins to the mainstream”

could be described as a shift to Church 2.0, with all its Christendom “variants.” Protestantism might be seen as Church 2.1, an upgrade of Christendom rather than a radical departure. And, while attempts have been made to return to a Church 1.0 system, church today still largely functions as Church 2.0—the mainstream.

A software upgrade to Church 3.0 is needed. It cannot be “just another patch to the same old system.”<sup>31</sup> The needed upgrade involves radical change at the very core of church. A new chapter is needed. Digging into Acts and exploring Jesus’ continuing mission will shape and cultivate the resilience needed for us to write the next chapter—Acts “29.”

## **APPLICATION FOR TODAY**

Read through Acts in one sitting.

How would you describe this experience? What major impressions do you take away from reading this letter as a whole, from beginning to end?

Having read Acts, observe how the successive phases of Jesus’ disciple-making and movement-building was replicated by His body—the church. This book follows these five phases as observed in Acts—our textbook for church-planting in hostile and tough mission environments:

### **1. Preparation**

Luke’s introduction to Acts (1:1–11) reminds us of Jesus’ life and teachings, the terror of His crucifixion, the despair of His death, and the overwhelming joy of His resurrection. For His disciples, their journey with Him was their preparation for mission following His ascension.

### **2. Foundations**

Pentecost was the transition to the foundations phase. As in Jesus’ earthly ministry, this next phase was based in Jerusalem and Judea. It was a time of exciting growth.



During His early Judean ministry, Jesus gained more disciples than John the Baptist (John 4:1), and during this phase for the early church, Jerusalem was “filled” with His teaching, “the word of God spread,” “the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith” (Acts 5:28; 6:7).

This dynamic growth of the church and the excitement of sharing the gospel in Jerusalem came to a “terrible climax”<sup>32</sup> with the mob attack on Stephen. But this did not derail their witness. It simply changed their direction and launched them into an expanded mission field. Believers were scattered and they spoke of Jesus wherever they travelled (Acts 8:1, 4).

### 3. Participation

Stephen’s sermon and martyrdom paved the way for Jewish Christians to receive Samaritans into their fellowship, as well as an Ethiopian eunuch, a bigoted persecutor and an unclean gentile army officer. The “ugly sin of discrimination” manifest in racism, nationalism, tribalism and sexism—along with gender discrimination and prejudice—so obscenely “offensive to human dignity,” was no longer to divide.<sup>33</sup> The grace of God was for all, and Barnabas “saw” this in Christianity’s first multicultural church in Syrian Antioch (Acts 11:23).

Jesus launched His third phase of mission with His invitation for disciples to fish with Him. He took them on fishing trips<sup>34</sup>—fishing for followers in synagogues, homes, towns, villages and beside the lakeshore—training them in disciple-making.

For the early church, the key priority of this phase was also participation, with every believer a disciple-making disciple. Scattered by persecution, believers—but not the apostles chosen by Jesus from His many disciples (Acts 8:1; compare Luke 6:13)—travelled to Antioch. They shared the “good news about the Lord Jesus” with Greeks as well as Jews, with “great numbers” turning to the Lord (Acts 11:19–21). A tent-maker named Barnabas invited Saul—also a tent-maker—to join the Antioch team. “Great numbers” were encouraged, taught and equipped (Acts 11:26),

facilitating transition to a culture of leadership multiplication.

## 4. Leadership multiplication

As with Jesus, this fourth phase of leadership multiplication saw the kingdom movement develop rapidly, but the opposition was violent. The parallels between Paul's experience with his teams of leaders and Jesus with His would be uncanny, but for the fact that Paul was so committed to following Jesus' model.

His cruciform worldview, shaped by sacrificial love for others,<sup>35</sup> compelled Paul to unashamedly preach the good news of Jesus to gentiles across the Roman world. He dedicated all his energy to this task, refining and crafting his disciple-making to the example of Jesus. During his last recorded missionary journey, Paul saw increased evidence of a multicultural movement. Two years of equipping believers and leaders in Ephesus resulted in "all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia" hearing "the word of the Lord" (Acts 19:10). An explosive, Spirit-inspired movement was launched.

## 5. Movements

Introducing the fifth phase, Luke reports on Paul's imprisonment, trials and journey to Rome. Under house arrest, he "boldly and without hindrance . . . preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 28:31). In this way, Luke's second book comes to an abrupt end. There is a sense of incompleteness, just as with his gospel (Luke 24:50–53).

But it was not the end. It is how movements are built. By the end of His short ministry, Jesus left with the assurance of His continuing presence through the Holy Spirit. In the same way, Paul's relatively short ministry ends with him encouraging believers to have the "attitude" of Christ Jesus: "in humility consider others better than yourselves" (Philippians 2:3–5).

Paul lived his Master's story of status reversal, conformity to the heart of God for others, even death. He disappeared from the scene, executed, for

the movement did not depend on him. It could only be a movement if he equipped and released others for the unfinished narrative—the unwritten Acts 29. This is what movement-builders for the kingdom of God must do.

PHASE 1  
PREPARATION

PHASE 1  
**PREPARATION: An Expanded  
vision**

**Acts 1:1–2:47**

Luke's purpose was clear. He wrote as an historian, apologist and theologian.<sup>1</sup> He was inspired to record an “orderly account” of all Jesus “began to do and teach” until His ascension—recorded in his Gospel—and, after that, His activities and teaching from heaven through His Spirit and body of disciples—outlined in Acts (Luke 1:1–4; Acts 1:1–4).

The message and methods of His followers were the same as His, but Jesus expanded the vision. His disciple-making movement would no longer be within the confines of Judea and Galilee, with brief forays into Samaria or to the “other side” of Lake Galilee. It would reach “the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

For His disciples, this vision was confronting. They were Jews. The “ends of the earth” represented the darkest regions of evil. It was too much for them to grasp. But they had experienced the trauma of Jesus' trial and crucifixion, and He was now alive. Their resurrected Lord had met them on a Galilean mountain and commissioned them: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

## To all relational streams

As He spoke He might have gazed to pagan territories beyond the lake, the “ends of the earth.” He spoke of reaching “all ethnē”—people groups, cultures, those who speak the same language, eat together, share life, intermarry—not only territories or countries.<sup>2</sup> We could call these relational streams.

Jesus’ commission was to make disciples in all relational streams. This meant welcoming hated Samaritans, as well as unclean gentiles and despised barbarians, into the same fellowship as Jewish disciples—and not just a few. Could this become reality? Was it possible? Jesus was expanding their vision.

## Holy Spirit baptism

The second feature of this expanded vision was Jesus’ promise to be with them always (Matthew 28:20). This would be realised through Holy Spirit baptism—a new experience for them (Acts 1:5).

John the Baptist first mentioned this promise when preparing people for the coming Messiah. While John baptised “with water for repentance,” he prophesied of the Christ: “He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Matthew 3:11).<sup>3</sup>

Six months before His crucifixion, on the last and greatest day of the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus called to the crowds participating in that day’s water-pouring ceremony at the temple:<sup>4</sup> “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” The apostle John understood Jesus was speaking of “the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified” (John 7:37–39).

When lifted up on the cross, the glory of Jesus was seen (John 12:23–33). There the nature of God was exposed. He was the God of the other, willing to sacrifice Himself for His enemies, to forgive and reconcile them to Himself. Now, the resurrected Jesus referred to John the Baptist’s

prophecy: the Spirit would baptise them in a few days (Acts 1:5).

## Preparation time

Jesus' time with His disciples had been their preparation. As Jesus' anointing by the Spirit marked the transition from His preparation years into His early Judean ministry, the baptism of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost day empowered His body—the church—for a new phase of ministry. And, as with their Master, they would also lay the foundations of their ministry in Jerusalem and Judea.

But they were not to put down roots in Jerusalem, “waiting for the world to flood in.” They were to “move out.”<sup>5</sup> Jesus' movement would encompass unclean gentiles, including Romans, barbarians, all ethnē or relational streams. From a Jewish perspective, this was impossible; but this is the movement-building of Jesus, a movement motivated by love for God and others. Believers replicated what Jesus did. In Him—the incarnation of God—the gospel of the kingdom (the message) and the process of movement-building (the method) were revealed.

The apostles closely modelled their witness and movement-building on Jesus' example. This first phase (Guides 1 to 3) explores their preparation and expanded vision.

PHASE 1  
PREPARATION

# GUIDE 1

## Essential Preparation

Acts 1:1–26

Early one Shabbat, I rang the entrance bell to the Russian Orthodox Monastery of Ascension on the Mount of Olives overlooking the Old City of Jerusalem. After some hours, morning prayers in the chapel ended and I was permitted to climb the Tower of Ascension. About 2000 years ago, with believers gathered around Him, Jesus had ascended and disappeared into the clouds from this hilltop.

The followers of Jesus had a lot to process. It was only seven weeks since His crucifixion, followed by the drama of His resurrection and many appearances. He had eaten with them, commanded them to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit, then ascended into the clouds from the Mount of Olives.

So why was it important for Jesus to leave? What was the impact on His movement? How did His departure release His followers to multiply His movement of disciple-making? What essential messages from their years of preparation with Jesus were highlighted by Luke?

### Essentials for a disciple-making movement

1. Spirit baptism

Jesus had depended on the Spirit. Even following His resurrection, He gave “instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen . . . and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive” (Acts 1:2, 3). The future of His movement would depend on Holy Spirit-baptised people. This is the only way in which they could fulfill His vision of a kingdom (Acts 1:3) reaching all relational streams, to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:4–8).

## 2. Witnessing

The Spirit would baptise followers to do the same work Jesus had been doing—and in the same way. On the evening following His resurrection, He told them, “As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you” (John 20:21). They were to tell people about Jesus, witnessing to His life, death and resurrection (Acts 1:22)—and making other disciples. They understood: there is no movement without disciple-making—disciples making disciples who make disciples.

## 3. The model

Jesus’ way of making disciples was their model. It could not be otherwise. They had been called and equipped by Him. Using five invitations, He had modelled the path of discipleship: connecting with them, engaging, involving, equipping and releasing them to multiply.

Invitation	Process	Nature of invite
1. Come and see	Connect	Experiential
2. Follow me	Engage	Relational
3. Fish with me	Involve	Participatory
4. Deny self, love enemies	Equip	Sacrificial
5. Receive the Spirit	Send to multiply	Empowered



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It was a simple, effective process. Jesus had mingled with them, desiring the best for them. Displaying genuine sympathy and meeting their needs, He won their trust and then extended the invitation, “Follow me.”<sup>6</sup> In taking the first steps, they were disciples. All were empowered and equipped to share their experience with Jesus, inviting others to join them as disciples. These were basic skills for all disciples. This was their preparation and their model for future ministry.

#### 4. Sacrificial living

Jesus’ life was one of sacrifice. Using a variety of action words, Luke described Him doing, teaching, instructing, convincing, proving, eating with His disciples, and commanding them to wait for the Spirit’s anointing (Acts 1:3–8). It was not easy for first-century Jews or gentiles to become followers of Jesus. N T Wright observes that “Christianity summoned proud pagans to face torture and death out of loyalty to a Jewish villager who had been executed by Rome. . . . Choosing to become a Christian was not an easy or natural thing for the average pagan.”<sup>7</sup> But the self-sacrificial lives and testimonies of transformed disciples revealed His death as the source of life.<sup>8</sup>

#### 5. The end vision

Just as Jesus was intentional in coming into this world, so His disciples understood clearly His end vision for them. They had received their commission (Matthew 28:18-20), then in Luke’s summary of their preparation years, Jesus’ end vision was restated: disciples multiplying disciples to “the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). This would require intentionality, sacrifice, resilience and—above all—Spirit baptism.

#### 6. They saw Him go

Five times Luke repeats that the disciples saw Jesus ascend into the

heavens (Acts 1:9–11). This was “the watershed” between His earthly and heavenly ministries.<sup>9</sup> They had to let Him go. This was essential preparation. They were not to expect further resurrection appearances. The earth, not the sky, was to preoccupy their attention. They were to wait for the Holy Spirit, then proceed with their mission. They were to go to the world as witnesses, not stargazers.<sup>10</sup>

## 7. Prayer

Talking with Jesus became a natural thing to do. Returning to the upstairs room “where they were staying” in Jerusalem, they “joined together constantly in prayer.” This group of about 120 believers included “the women”—maybe the trio who had supported Jesus and the apostles financially (Luke 8:1–3)—as well as the mother of Jesus and His brothers, who were now believers<sup>11</sup> (Acts 1:12–14). Prayer confirmed their conviction that Jesus was indeed God.

## 8. The Word

During these days of waiting and prayer, Peter proposed choosing a replacement apostle for Judas who had betrayed Jesus. In his explanation for this step, he foreshadowed the centrality of the Word in Acts: “The Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago” (Acts 1:16). French scholar Daniel Marguerat sees the Word as “the real hero” of Acts.<sup>12</sup> Kayle de Waal adds: “The Word moves the narrative of Acts forward and in new directions.”<sup>13</sup> The increase of disciples cannot be separated from the increase and spread of the Word. The Word is central to movements.<sup>14</sup>

## 9. Choosing key people

Selecting a replacement for Judas was not haphazard. Peter urged two qualities be considered: a track record with Jesus (Acts 1:21) and “a witness with us of his resurrection” (Acts 1:22). Having judged two the “worthiest to fill the vacancy,” they used lots to select Matthias over

Barsabbas<sup>15</sup> (Acts 1:23–26). While foreign to us, it was a means “of discerning God’s will which was sanctioned in the Old Testament” and used until the Spirit came.<sup>16</sup> It was perhaps less political and open to abuse than some other election processes.

Jesus had emphasised the importance of identifying those who can multiply disciples. He called them people of peace (Luke 10:5). They have influence in their relational streams. Others follow them. They are key to movement-building.

## Pentecost

So “when the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place” (Acts 2:1). They were ready for the era of the Spirit. He would multiply their disciple-making, and Jesus’ kingdom movement would go viral.

## **APPLICATION FOR TODAY**

1. Luke identifies core convictions. In what way do these shape your life and disciple-making?

- Jesus’ message and mission, teaching and activities (Acts 1:1, 2).
- Jesus is alive (Acts 1:3).
- The kingdom of God is our focus (Acts 1:3).
- Holy Spirit baptism empowers witness (Acts 1:4–8).
- The Spirit restores the kingdom (Acts 1:6–8).
- Jesus’ mission is now ours (Acts 1:9–11).

- Prayer connects us to God’s mission and movement (Acts 1:12–14, 23–26).
2. Why do you believe Jesus’ ascension was important for the spread of His disciple-making kingdom movement? Why was it important for Him to leave?
  3. In surveying Luke’s book of Acts, who were other movement leaders who stepped out of the way? Why might this be an important movement principle?
  4. Read Luke’s description of Jesus’ training for disciple-makers in Luke 10:1–9. What key steps did Jesus identify in the process of disciple-making?

## Essential preparation

Prior to His ascension, Jesus stretched His disciples’ vision to the limit, declaring, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” But this prediction was prefaced with His promise: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you” (Acts 1:8). His promise and prediction echoed the words of Isaiah 49:6: “I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”<sup>17</sup> His vision for them was unrealistic without an anointing by the same Spirit as had baptised Him.

# End of product sample

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