

BACKGROUND

Author and Date: The Book of Acts, written around AD 63, serves as a follow-up sequel to the Gospel of Luke. It accounts for the early progress of Jesus' disciples taking the gospel and starting churches from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and the rest of the Mediterranean world. Both Acts and Luke were written by a physician named Luke who was known to have traveled with the apostle Paul for parts of his ministry. The initial purpose for both books was for a man named Theopholis to aid his understanding of the life, ministry, and impact of Jesus (cf. Luke 1:3-4). Throughout the book of Acts, one can see a detailed account of the start and expansion of the early church after the resurrection of Jesus. The book of Acts not only details life immediately following the resurrection of Jesus, but it also provides a timeline and historical context for the rest of the New Testament (Romans through Revelation).

ACTS OUTLINE

- Preparing the First Witnesses (1:1-2:13)
- Witnesses in Jerusalem (2:14-5:42)
- Witnessing past Jerusalem, Cyprus, and Galatia (6:1-14:28)
- The Jerusalem Council (15:1-35)
- Witness Journeys:
 - To Greece (15:36-18:22)
 - To Ephesus (18:23 21:16)
 - The Arrest in Jerusalem (21:17-23:35)
 - To Caesarea (24:1-26:32)
 - To Rome (27:1-28:31)

THEMES

- Disciples living out Jesus' promise to be witnesses through the presence, power, guidance, and work of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8, 2:38-49, 4:5-22, 18:12-16, 28:25, etc.)
- The effect of Jesus' life, teaching, and resurrection on the life of the church (6:7, 9:31, 12:24, 16:5, 19:20)
- Suffering for the sake of the Kingdom can be expected. (5:40, ch. 7, 9:16, 14:22, 21:13)
- The saving and redeeming work of Jesus is for all people Jews and Gentiles alike, who can serve as witnesses to the power of Jesus. (chs. 2-5, 10:1-11:18, 16:11-34, etc.)

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSES

Acts 1:8

- Acts 18:26

- Acts 2:24

Acts 24:16

- Acts 13:32-33

PERSONAL STUDY OVERVIEW

R.E.A.D. Approach

We view personal study as the regular rhythm where we live in God's Word, so that we may live out His truths. Namely, we seek to apply the Bible to our lives and adjust accordingly, not the other way around. (see. James 1:22-25, 1 John 5:2-5). For every disciple, we put it this way: Head knowledge <---> Heart Change. Personal study is not just about gaining more head knowledge (1 Corinthians 8:1), but also letting ourselves be changed and living different lives by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. If we are willing to open our hearts and minds to Scripture, we ought to open our lives as well!

As disciples of Jesus, the awareness to be in the Word of God exists for each and every one of us. We view the Bible as God's sovereign plan, intent, and desire for all of creation - as well as the ultimate authority in knowing, loving, and living as a disciple in the Kingdom of God. (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 1 Timothy 4:7-10, Hebrews 4:12).

For spiritual disciplines, when it comes down to it, the most important thing is to put that rhythm into practice. Whether it's prayer, personal study, honoring the sabbath, or using our spiritual gifts, there may not be one "right" way; but there are definitely "wrong" ways! Here at FIRST we encourage The R.E.A.D. Approach for our personal study. (Again, this isn't the only way to read and apply the Bible!)

THE R.E.A.D. APPROACH

For every text - and we always recommend reading a minimum of full paragraphs, if not full chapters - we can ask ourselves the following as we seek to let it transform our lives.

Reflect: After reading a section of Scripture, pause to *reflect* on what you just read and let the words sit. Maybe spending a few moments in prayer to ask the Holy Spirit to bring understanding, conviction, or insight into that passage.

Examine: Spend some time *examining* the passage. What was said? Who was involved? How does this portion fit with the paragraphs around it or the book as a whole? This is a good spot to make some observations of repetitive words, key details given, or figures of speech used (usually good signs of important stuff!). The key question to ask is, *what did this mean to the original audience who received this text?*

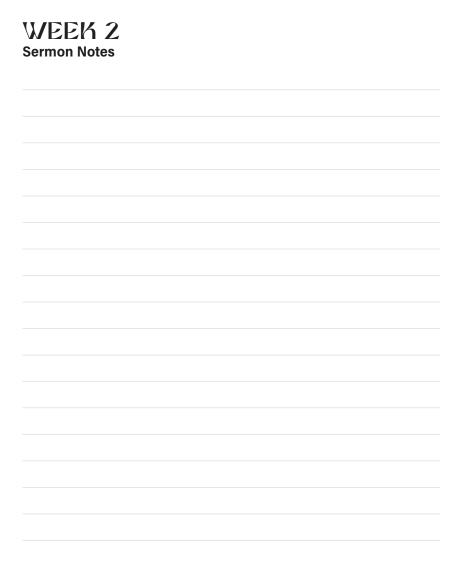
Apply: If the goal of personal study is for head knowledge to lead to heart change, we need to do the work to see how it applies to us today. Consider what this passage teaches you about God, others, the world around you, or even yourself. Even though we don't live in the ancient Middle East, the Bible is still very much applicable to our lives. This is a good time to not assume what the *character* did as an example - unless it specifically says so - but rather to focus on the heart or trust in God of their actions.

Do: Sometimes we may feel we have finished our personal study after we've learned something new or arrived at a stark reminder. But nonetheless, the Word of God is designed to also penetrate our hearts to work itself out in our lives. What do I need to *do* to live this out - and why is it important for the Kingdom of God?

WEEK I Sermon Notes			

As we begin this journey in Acts together, take a moment to reflect on all that God has been doing in your life and thank Him. We also want to look forward to what God will do. Write out some of the hopes and questions you have for our time in Acts.

R.E.A.D. Personal Study #2: Matthew 28



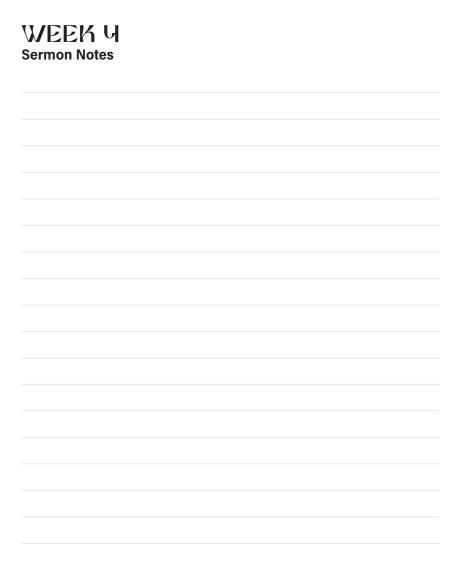
There is no Church without community. What do you desire in a community? What does God desire? Reflect on who your community currently is, pray for them, and/or pray for a community to walk with if you do not yet have one.



R.E.A.D. Personal Study #2: Joel 2, Psalm 16, Psalm 110

We are all broken and fall short of the glory that God longs for us to embody to the world. Spend a few minutes in prayer, bringing whatever sin and brokenness that comes to mind before God. Know that in Christ, you are forgiven. However, repentance involves change and obedience. How will you step out of lies and live into the Truth?

R.E.A.D	. Persona	l Study #2	2: Deuter	onomy 18	, Genesis 2	22	
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There is no one so ordinary that God cannot use them. Peter and John were recognized as those **who had been with Jesus**. Spend some time with Jesus as you feel led-in prayer, scripture, community, worship, silence, etc.

R.E.A.D. Personal Study #2: Psalm 2, Psalm 118

WEEK 5 Sermon Notes			

Stinginess is the fruit of pride and greed. Pray for God to reveal something that you have some kind of positive attachment that you could give away to someone else–a friend, a neighbor, a coworker–that would be a blessing to them. Part with it in joy.

R.E.A.D. Personal Study #2: Joshua 7

WEEK 6 Sermon Notes			

Spend time writing an encouraging note to the elders and/or pastors.

ı	R.E.A.D. Person	al Study #2: 1 1	imothy 3:1-12,	5:17-21; Titus 1:5	5-9, 2:1-8
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WEEK 7 Sermon Notes		

Spend some time praying for the Persecuted Church. If you need inspiration for specific prayers, go to www.persecution.com.

R.E.A.D. Personal Study #2: Exodus 1-3, Amos 5

WEEK 8 Sermon Notes		

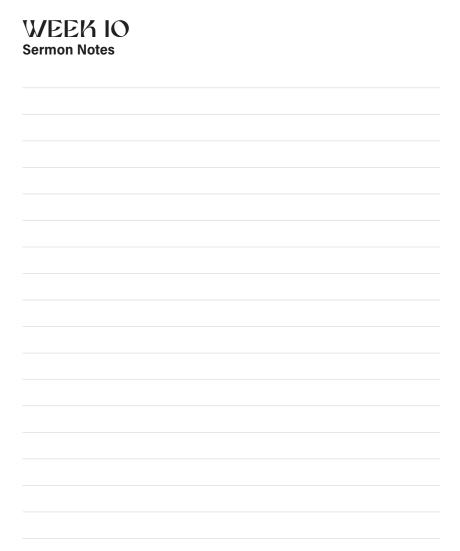
Focus on opportunities to share Jesus in both small and significant ways. Pray for courage and opportunity.

R.E.A.D. Personal Study #2: Isaiah 53

WEEK 9 Sermon Notes
Formation Exercise: Journal about your conversion story/testimony. We recommend it in 3 phases: Before I met Jesus my life was like But, I stepped into a new life in Jesus through and Because of my faith, is how I now live differently.

R.E.A.D.	Personal	Study	#1: <i>I</i>	Acts 9

R.E.A.D. Personal Study #2: Philippians 3, Galatians 1



Practice gratitude and restraint. Practice gratitude over something that is permissible - like bacon! And employ restraint over something that may not be helpful - perhaps a particular movie or show.

R.E.A.D. Personal Study #2: Galatians 3

WEEK II Sermon Notes			

Encourage someone who needs it with a conversation in person, call, or hand-written note. Pay attention to who might need it and get creative!

R.E.A.D. Personal Study #2: John 1



Pray for someone who needs freedom from a specific stronghold over their life of which you are aware. Worship God because of someone who has found freedom from a stronghold because of Jesus.

R.E.A.D. Personal Study #2: Genesis 39

WEEK 13 Sermon Notes		

Write down 3 names of people you can begin to "take the Gospel to" and follow-up with a practical first step for each.

R.E.A.D. Personal Study #2: Psalm 22

WEEK IV Sermon Notes		

Revisit the formation exercise from last week. Give yourself an update and keep up the good work!

R.E.A.D. Personal Study #2: Isaiah 55

Reflect on the people or groups in your life with you are most uncomfortable, don't get along, or disagree. Commit to praying blessings on them throughout your week.

R.E.A.D. Personal Study #2: Amos 9, Galatians 5



Faithful Israelites and Jews would pray and sing the Psalms in times of trouble, which was likely what Paul and Silas were doing. Spend some time and pray a Psalm a day, and if you really want to be stretched, sing it to a tune!

R.E.A.D. Personal Study #2: Daniel 6

WEEK I/ Sermon Notes		

Spend some time praying for the Holy Spirit to reveal to you an "unnamed idol" in your life - probably something we may not think of as an idol or could be something that's "good," but has become "god"! Then, write out 2 practical steps to overcome the idolatry to that thing.

R.E.A.D. Personal Study #2: 1 Thessalonians 1

MEER 18 **Sermon Notes**

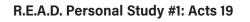
Formation Exercise:

Invite someone to read the Bible with you for the next month. Commit to ask each other one simple question each week: What did Jesus teach you in His Word?

R.E.A.D. Personal Study #2: 1 Corinthians 16

WEEK 19 Sermon Notes		

Reflect on your baptism. Write out a few sentences of that day and what led you to making that choice. If you have not yet been baptized, be praying over that decision.



R.E.A.D. Personal Study #2: Romans 19, Ephesians 3

WEEK 20 Sermon Notes		

Jesus said, "it is more blessed to give than to receive." Take a look at your personal generosity (time, talents, and treasure). Prayerfully consider where you may take a next step in one or more of those areas.

R.E.A.D. Personal Study #2: Ephesians 6

WEEK 21 **Sermon Notes**

Formation Exercise:

Spend some time reflecting on Jesus' life from his arrest to His resurrection. Write out a few thoughts, praises, or repentances that come to your heart and mind.

R.E.A.D. Personal Study #2: John 18-19

Sermon Notes		

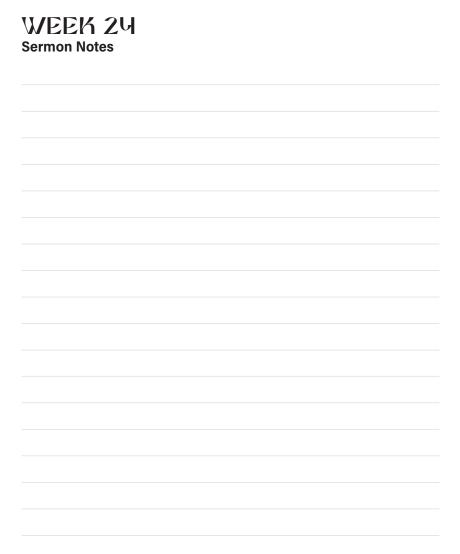
In the vein of being prepared to give an answer for your faith, answer the following: What opportunities do you have to leverage for the Gospel? What are the most common rejections of Jesus you hear? How might God use you to spur on faith in others?

R.E.A.D. Personal Study #2: 1 Peter 3

WEEN ZS Sermon Notes)		

God is constantly working in people and situations all around you, whether through believers or non-believers, to accomplish His will. What are some people or circumstances in your life that you see God at work in surprising ways? Journal these.

R.E.A.D. Personal Study #2: Exodus 22



Our hope is not in a disembodied heaven but in resurrected bodies and a new creation. The early Church was known as "followers of the Way," which was a relational, practice-based, way of being and living in this world. How has God created you to make a difference in this life for his Kingdom? Journal about this.

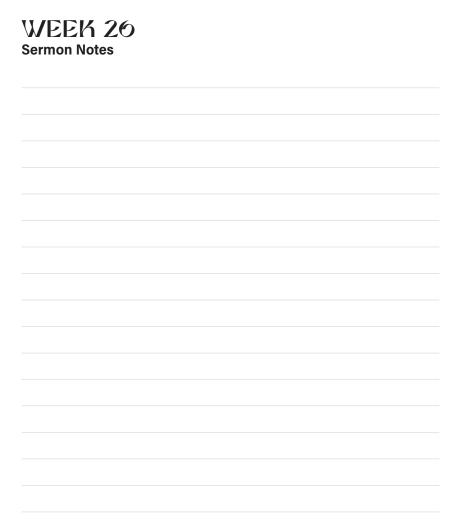
R.E.A.D. Personal Study #2: Revelation 21-22

Sermon Notes		

MCCK 28

Our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against powers and principalities. Paul knew this and was able to persevere in the face of continued accusation. Reflect specifically on Ephesians 6:13-17. Which pieces of the armor do you feel the deepest need for? Pray for God to grow this in you.

R.E.A.D. Personal Study #2: Ephesians 6



When we are living fully into our life and calling with Jesus, we, like Paul, will often be seen as "out of our minds." In our society, image management is a significant idol. Spend this week intentionally **not** trying to impress others, act in a certain way, or curate all the best looking social media posts. Instead, be willing to be plain and authentic, and even weird for Jesus.

R.E.A.D. Personal Study #2: 2 Corinthians 5

WEEK 27 **Sermon Notes**

Formation Exercise:

The reality of this life is not that storms won't come, but rather whether we will be able to weather them. The only surefire way to do this is to keep our eyes focused on Jesus. Read the Gospel of Mark this week and imagine yourself in the shoes of the disciples in every story.

R.E.A.D. Personal Study #2: Mark 4

WEEK 28 **Sermon Notes**

Formation Exercise:

Reflect and journal on the ways in which you have been and are being sent to be a missionary for Christ where you live, work, and play. Prayerfully consider what new territory God may be inviting you to take within your sphere of influence for the Kingdom of God, whether that is relationships with certain neighbors or coworkers, engaging certain roles and responsibilities with renewed passion at your job or in your home, or even taking a step out into the unknown territory of a new mission field.

R.E.A.D. Personal Study #2: Isaiah 6

