



**SPARK**  
HOW THE  
CHURCH BEGAN  
ROOTED ACT VI



As we continue reading through the Bible, this year we've come to **Rooted: Act VI**. This is a study and reflection guide to accompany the Act VI Reading Plan and Sermon Series, focused on the first part of the book of Acts. The daily readings may focus on a single chapter or move through several chapters of Acts and other New Testament books.

You may miss a day; just pick up where you left off or skip ahead. Keep going! Use this booklet to get an overview or to catch up!

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The point isn't to accomplish a task; the point is to spend meaningful time in Scripture.

The Bible is the living word of God meant to shape us as we read it. Full of thought-provoking and life-changing material, the redemptive arc of the Bible points to the core message: That a man, Jesus, who was fully God, came to live among us, die on our behalf, and rise in a cosmic act of love and redemption so that we can have a restored relationship with God and others.

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Find out how to go deeper in your faith this season here:



CHURCHBCC.ORG/ROOTED

# daily reading guide

APRIL 7 - MAY 18

## WEEK 1

### New Beginnings

- April 7 Sunday Worship
- April 8 Matthew 28–Acts 1
- April 9 Acts 2
- April 10 Acts 3–4
- April 11 1 Peter 1–3:7
- April 12 1 Peter 3:8–5:14
- April 13 2 Peter 1–3

## WEEK 2

### Indwelling Spirit

- April 14 Sunday Worship
- April 15 1 John 1:1–2:2; 4:1–5:21
- April 16 2 John–3 John
- April 17 Acts 5–7
- April 18 Acts 8–9
- April 19 1 Timothy 1–4
- April 20 1 Timothy 5–6; 2 Timothy 1:1–14; 2 Timothy 3:10–4:8

## WEEK 3

### Compassionate Community

- April 21 Sunday Worship
- April 22 Acts 10–11
- April 23 Acts 12–13
- April 24 James 1–2
- April 25 James 3–5
- April 26 Titus
- April 27 Philemon

## WEEK 4

### Body of Christ

- April 28 Sunday Worship
- April 29 1 Corinthians 1–3
- April 30 1 Corinthians 4–6
- May 1 1 Corinthians 7–9
- May 2 1 Corinthians 10–12
- May 3 1 Corinthians 13–14
- May 4 1 Corinthians 15–16

## WEEK 5

### New Life in Christ

- May 5 Sunday Worship
- May 6 2 Corinthians 1–2
- May 7 2 Corinthians 3–4
- May 8 2 Corinthians 5–6
- May 9 2 Corinthians 7–8
- May 10 2 Corinthians 9–10
- May 11 2 Corinthians 11–13

## WEEK 6

### Transcendent Unity

- May 12 Sunday Worship
- May 13 Acts 14–15
- May 14 Hebrews 1–3
- May 15 Hebrews 4–6
- May 16 Hebrews 7–9
- May 17 Hebrews 10–11
- May 18 Hebrews 12–13

## (NOW) QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Notice who is in this reading and what you feel drawn to and away from.
2. Open your heart to see yourself and your community in this reading.
3. Where do you sense God is leading you through this reading today?



## SPARK: How the Church Began

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF READING PLAN

A spark can either be a small fiery particle that quickly burns out, as it has nothing to share its fire and energy with, or it can be the beginning of what will turn into a roaring blaze—metaphorically or actually. **The book of Acts and the New Testament letters are packed with sparks that tell the story of how the Church began, how the disciples lived into their calling to build the Church, and how we too are invited to wholeheartedly follow Jesus together.**

Throughout the Act VI sermon series and reading plan, we'll see sparks in the final teachings of Jesus, the coming of the Spirit to empower the followers of Christ to bear witness from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, the unity of all people found in Christ, and the priesthood of all believers.

At the dawn of the book of Acts, the early Church is created and growing at a breakneck pace, propelled by the monumental events unfolding before them: Jesus' resurrection, Peter's impassioned proclamation to the masses, and the rapid influx of thousands embracing the faith. Yet amidst this fervent momentum, Luke, the author of Acts, pauses to draw attention to the foundational sparks and embers that fuel the Church's mission.

**Just as sparks and embers kindle and sustain a fire's warmth and light, the foundational practices in these readings nurture the flame of faith within Christian community.** What we will read about are not mere rituals, but instead are vital sparks that illuminate the path forward, guiding believers as they navigate the complexities of life during their walk with God. Throughout the first half of Acts, pay close attention to themes that resurface. Repeated sparks serve as constant reminders of believers' shared identity as members of God's family. Unified by faith, fellowship, and common vision, they are empowered to extend the invitation into Jesus' family to all who seek to follow Him—an invitation that has been extended to us and is offered to the world through the Church today.

The reading plan begins with the birth of the Church in Acts and includes some New Testament letters. This booklet provides an overview and reflection questions on several defining attributes of the Church:

- New Beginnings
- Indwelling Spirit
- Compassionate Community
- Body of Christ
- New Life in Christ
- Transcendent Unity

## A Few Key People & Places:

**Luke:** Luke authored the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. He was known as “the beloved physician,” which may explain the emphasis on Jesus' healing acts.

**Theophilus:** This name, meaning “loved by God,” may be a generic title for all Christians, or it may refer to a specific person, possibly the Roman lawyer who defended Paul.

**Peter:** A prominent disciple of Jesus, Peter's fervent discipleship, close friendship with Jesus, and role as a “pillar” of the early Church are highlighted.

**Saul to Paul:** Saul led the way in the persecution of Christians, but when he encountered Jesus on the road to Emmaus, even his name changed! Paul became a Christian missionary. (Acts 13:9)

**Jerusalem:** Signified as the birthplace of the Church, Jerusalem holds significance as the city where Jesus was crucified and where the Holy Spirit descended on Pentecost, marking the inception of the Church.

**Samaria:** In the opening chapter of Acts, the resurrected Christ specifically and unexpectedly calls out Samaria when he proclaims: “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) With these words, Jesus made it clear that the gospel was to go into all nations. (Matthew 28)

## WEEK 1

**New Beginnings**

After Jesus rose from the dead, he appeared to his disciples atop the Mount of Olives. There, Jesus imparted final instructions regarding what would follow saying:

*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.***

**Matthew 28:** The Great Commission

Luke, in his account, intertwines this moment with many biblical narratives. The forty days allude to Israel's time in the wilderness, and the setting evokes memories of Sinai, where God ordained a nation of priests to represent Him to the world.

Luke underscores the continuity of this narrative. Just as Moses led Israel out of Egypt's bondage, Jesus, as a new Moses, liberates humanity from the enslavement of sin. As the disciples follow Jesus, like the Israelites followed Moses, the Church begins to grow.

Initially, it seemed the followers of Jesus would be based in Jerusalem, the home turf of the disciples. But Jesus immediately expands the mission beyond familiar territory. Despite cultural, ethnic, and theological barriers, he includes all regions in the invitation to follow him —Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and even the ends of the earth. **The Church grew; the story continued and is unfolding still today.**

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

1. Here, we're reading about the creation of the Church, what has been your relationship and journey with the Church? How has that connected you closer to Christ? How, if at all, has it made your relationship with Christ harder?
2. How does Jesus' invitation to spread His message resonate with you?
3. What barriers might inhibit us from embracing Jesus' call to reach out to all regions, including those we find challenging or unfamiliar?

**...the True Church can never fail. For it is based upon a rock.**

T.S. Eliot

## WEEK 2

**Indwelling Spirit**

Just as the Holy Spirit is a key part of the beginning of the Church, Genesis shows us that the Holy Spirit was intricately involved in Creation, hovering over the water, bringing order, harmony, beauty, function, and life from nothingness. Throughout Scripture, the Holy Spirit is active, resting on specific people as they do God-sized and ordained tasks: Bezalel (Exodus 31:1-5), Gideon (Judges 6:14-15), Samson (Judges 15:14), and others.

The Old Testament prophets spoke about the Spirit in anticipation of what was to come: a new heart and the Spirit of God in us (Ez 36:26-27), and a Spirit poured out on all people (Joel 2:28-29). **We see a shift from specific people, tasks, and times to a gift from God for everyone, everywhere.**

The story of Scripture has a rising sense of anticipation of what's to come in that crowded room in Jerusalem that we read about in Acts 2. It's here, at this very moment, that the global Church is born. Through the Holy Spirit, every disciple is empowered to hear from and speak to the triune God directly, to know a new level of intimacy with our Creator, and have the wisdom to share the message of God's salvation through Jesus.

All who have said "yes" to following Christ have received the Spirit that Jesus spoke of in John 14:15-31 and that was promised in Acts 1:8. This new heart, the Holy Spirit residing in you, is doing the same work we've seen from the beginning: bringing life, creativity, words, strength, and freedom all in the name of Jesus. AND, just as we see here in Acts, no one does this alone, but united through Jesus, we do this in community.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

1. How do you currently understand and/or experience the work of the Holy Spirit? Where do you have questions and/or curiosity?
2. In what ways, big or small, do you see the Spirit at work in your life bringing order, harmony, beauty, function, and life?
3. What attributes of the Church do you notice in Acts 2: 42-47? How have these been a part of your experience of the Church community? Which of these traits would you want to increasingly experience?

**I go to church every Sunday, which is like going to the gas station once a week and really, really filling up.**

Anne Lamott

## WEEK 3

**Compassionate Community**

One of the defining marks of the early church was a commitment to caring for those in need. Led by the Spirit, the church in Acts shared what they had with each other, ensuring that there were no needy persons among them. This way of life was an expression of the new lives they now had through God's Spirit; it came out of the overflow rather than coercion or a form of legalism. Looking back, the early church was fulfilling God's hope for the way His people were to treat the poor and needy. Looking forward, the early church was anticipating the way it would one day live in God's future Kingdom.

In Deuteronomy 15, Israelites are instructed to live in such a way that there would not be any poor among them. Throughout their history, the Israelites struggled to uphold this instruction. But through the outpouring of the Spirit, **the first believers were empowered to share their possessions and sell them when necessary to care for those in need.**

This way of life not only pointed to God's hope for humankind, but it anticipated God's coming Kingdom. The early church's generosity and care for each other was a sign of God's future Kingdom, which began with Jesus and will be fully realized when he comes again.

Until then, the Spirit-led Church continues to reflect God's concern for the vulnerable through a lifestyle of compassion, sharing, and generosity. In doing so, it is learning in the present—the language, customs, and practices of God's future. Today, whenever the Church reflects God's generosity and love for the vulnerable or those in need, it witnesses to and anticipates the day in which God's Kingdom arrives in full.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

1. In what ways does the generosity of the early church encourage you? In what ways does it challenge you?
2. How does our interaction with those in need and/or our relationship to our possessions reflect our beliefs about God?
3. What are some ways that we can better reflect God's concern for the needy as individuals, as families, and as a church?

## WEEK 4

**The Body of Christ**

1 Corinthians describes the early church as the body of Christ. Like the Church today, the early church faced challenges to remain united. In response to its divisions, the church in Acts was encouraged to remember that all its members were part of a single body. In the same way that a human body needs the diversity of its parts to function properly, both the early church and the Church today need all of its members and the unique gifts they bring.

Believers in the early church with different cultural and social backgrounds were united as one body and were invited to remember Jesus together as one body. Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slave and free, were equally valuable members in the body of Christ. Yet, their equality in Christ does not negate their particular identities. **“We who are many, are one body, for we all share one loaf.”** (1 Corinthians 10:17)

In a human body, while our eyes need our ears, they are always eyes. They keep their unique identity while still remaining united to their other members. Similarly, Christ's body, the Church, allows for its members to be united in Christ, with a shared identity and mission, while maintaining their unique selves. The early church's diversity did not have to be a source of division but could be a testament to the unique unity made possible by Christ through faith, hope, and following the way of love. (1 Corinthians 13 and 14).

The body was not a mere metaphor for the early church. Because Christ experienced a literal death and resurrection, the Church represents not so much an institution, but a person: the person of Jesus who is now present in the body of his Church. Because Jesus' body was resurrected, the Church then and the Church today can trust that its diverse body will similarly be raised to new life when Jesus returns.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

1. How does understanding the Church as Christ's body help you understand and respond to Christians who are very different from you?
2. What are the tensions between unity and diversity, and how does the Church, as Christ's body, respond to them?
3. What does 1 Corinthians 12 teach the Church about how to treat the weaker members of its body, and what does that reveal about God? How might you live this out?

## WEEK 5

**New Life in Christ**

The concept of “new life” in Christ, as depicted in 2 Corinthians, extends far beyond individual transformation to encompass the collective renewal of the Church community. Throughout this letter, Paul vividly portrays believers as new creations in Christ, emphasizing the profound shift from old ways to the transformative power of the Gospel. This theme isn’t just a lofty idea; it’s a practical reality that impacts every facet of believers’ lives and interactions within the community of faith.

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul discusses the ministry of the new covenant, highlighting how believers are transformed by the Spirit into the image of Christ. This transformation isn’t something we achieve on our own; it’s a work of God’s grace, shaping us into vessels of His glory. Paul’s emphasis on the sufficiency of God’s Spirit underscores the communal nature of this transformation, reminding believers that our new life in Christ is a **shared experience** within the Church.

Moreover, in 2 Corinthians 4, Paul speaks of the treasure of the Gospel that we carry in jars of clay. Despite facing trials and hardships, believers are reminded of the surpassing power of God at work within them. This message of hope in the midst of adversity speaks directly to the communal resilience and perseverance of the Church. **As we support and encourage one another, we bear witness to the transformative power of the Gospel in our collective journey of faith.**

Paul’s exhortation in 2 Corinthians 7-9 emphasizes the importance of generosity and cheerful giving within the Church community. Believers are called to support one another financially and spiritually, reflecting the selfless love and sacrificial nature of Christ. This spirit of generosity fosters unity and mutual care within the Church.

In essence, the concept of “new life” in Christ, as presented throughout 2 Corinthians, speaks to the collective renewal and transformation of the Church community. As believers embrace their identity as new creations in Christ and live out their faith in community, they reflect the transformative power of the Gospel, embodying a living testimony of God’s redemptive work in the world.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

1. How does the idea of “new life” in Christ challenge your view of personal transformation within the Church?
2. How does Paul’s emphasis on God’s Spirit in 2 Corinthians encourage believers to embrace their identity as new creations in Christ together?
3. How can believers support each other through trials, reflecting the transformative power of the Gospel within the Church? In what ways have you or would you hope to experience this?

**The Church is the Church only when it exists for others.**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

## WEEK 6

**Transcendent Unity**

Acts 15 serves as a pivotal moment in the early church, addressing the tension between Jewish and Gentile believers. The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) deliberates on the inclusion of Gentiles into the Christian community, grappling with the question of whether adherence to Jewish customs, like circumcision, is necessary for salvation. The decision reached at the council, influenced by Peter's testimony and James' conclusion, underscores the primacy of faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. This decision not only affirms the unity of believers in their shared faith, but also celebrates their diversity, recognizing the cultural distinctions among them.

In Hebrews 1-3, the supremacy of Jesus Christ is emphasized, contrasting Him with angels and Moses. The author highlights **Jesus as the ultimate revelation of God, urging believers to fix their eyes on him and to heed his teachings**. This exhortation lays the foundation for unity within the Church, as believers are encouraged to center their faith solely on Christ rather than on external rituals or intermediaries.

Within the framework of Hebrews 7-9, the concept of the priesthood of all believers is introduced. Jesus Christ is portrayed as the eternal high priest who mediates between God and humanity, offering Himself as a perfect sacrifice for sin. This universal priesthood grants all believers direct access to God's presence, regardless of their background or status. It underscores the unity of believers in their shared identity as a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices and interceding for one another. At its best, this is the Church!

The call to persevere in faith despite trials and persecution becomes prominent in Hebrews 10-11. The author recounts the faithfulness of Old Testament figures like Abraham and Moses, who endured hardships by trusting in God's promises. Faith is defined as "being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Hebrews 12 offers comfort in knowing we are "surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses." Their examples are a source of encouragement, emphasizing the unity of believers across time. Final exhortations are offered in Hebrews 13: "Keep on loving each other as siblings... Do not forget to entertain strangers." Through worship, relationships, compassionate care, and by the presence and power of the indwelling Spirit, the Church is a spark that brings light to the world.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

1. How does Jesus' centrality in Hebrews 1-3 impact our church's worship, teaching, and practice?
2. How does faith in Jesus promote unity in Acts 15, while embracing diversity among believers?
3. How does the priesthood of all believers in Hebrews 7-9 shape our church's role and responsibility?

**The church holds the key to revival. It is within our grasp.**

Billy Graham

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### **Behind the Design**

These graphics portray a modern symbol of a spark. While the spark of the Holy Spirit is always fresh, we see ripples of the Spirit’s work through all of church history, alluded to by the religious paintings pictured in the “ripples” of the image.



*Special thank you to Bethany Pastors Jonathan Nolasco, Silas Sham, Brad Thayer, and Megan Dobrasz for these devotionals.*



**“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”**

1 Corinthians 12:27

**“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”**

Acts 2:42