

# Moving Forward in Faith: Lessons from the Book of Acts

The Book of Acts is all about moving forward. As we begin this journey through this powerful book, we discover that Christianity is designed to be a forward progression of faith. Just like Australia's coat of arms features the kangaroo and emu—animals that cannot move backward—our faith journey should always be pressing onward.

The key takeaway is simple yet profound: I need to be moving forward in step with God's Spirit and plan. Whether it's putting my faith in Jesus for salvation or doing the ministry work He's called me to, God wants to cooperate with me to do great things. He's actively looking to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose hearts are turned toward Him.

## Who Wrote the Book of Acts and Why?

The Book of Acts was written by Luke, the same author who wrote the Gospel of Luke. He was a Gentile doctor—the only non-Hebrew writer in the New Testament. Luke wrote this account around the early 60s AD, covering approximately 25-30 years of early church history, beginning with Jesus' ascension (around 33 AD) and ending with Paul preaching in Rome.

Luke addressed this book to Theophilus (whose name means "lover of God"), likely a Roman official who may have been Luke's friend or possibly even his master. The Gospel of Luke was Luke's first volume written to Theophilus, and Acts serves as the sequel.

## What Is the Book of Acts Really About?

While often called "Acts of the Apostles," this book could more accurately be titled "Acts of the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit is mentioned about 50 times throughout the book. Acts shows us what happens when people truly let Jesus lead their lives—how they're transformed and how the world gets "turned upside down" as a result.

The book divides into two main sections:

- Chapters 1-12: Focused on Jerusalem and surrounding areas, primarily through Peter's ministry
- Chapters 13-28: Following Paul as the gospel spreads throughout the known world

The key verse is Acts 1:8: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

## Why Should Christians Be Forward-Facing?

As believers, we need to be forward-facing rather than living in the past. We should be asking: "What does God want to do in and through my life today and tomorrow?" We should look forward to Christ's return.

Many people either live in the past, struggle in the present comparing themselves to others, or fear the unknown future. As believers, we can appreciate God's past work in our lives without dwelling there. Instead, we should anticipate the future things God wants to do through us.

## **What Makes Jesus Unique According to Acts?**

In the opening verses of Acts, Luke summarizes Jesus' life and ministry by highlighting three important aspects:

1. His preaching and ministry - Jesus "began to do and to teach" and gave commands to follow
2. His power - Jesus was "taken up" to heaven, demonstrating unmatched power
3. His proofs - Jesus presented Himself alive "by many infallible proofs" over 40 days

Jesus appeared at least ten different times after His resurrection—five times on Easter Sunday alone. These appearances continued through the 40 days before His ascension, and even afterward to Stephen, Paul, and John. These multiple appearances provide infallible proof that Jesus is alive.

### **Three Key Lessons About Moving Forward with God:**

1. Moving forward God's way means knowing who Jesus is
2. Moving forward God's way recognizes a powerful God is involved in my life
3. Moving forward realizes I'm not following Jesus by blind faith, but by proven faith

## **How Does the Holy Spirit Empower Believers?**

Before ascending to heaven, Jesus instructed His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for "the promise of the Father"—the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This waiting period wasn't punishment; it was preparation for something powerful.

Jesus made an important distinction between John's baptism with water and the coming baptism with the Holy Spirit:

- John's baptism: John was the agent, water was the element, preparing hearts for the Messiah was the goal
- Spirit baptism: Jesus is the agent, the Spirit is the element, being powerful witnesses to the ends of the earth is the goal

## **What Should Be Our Focus as Believers?**

When the disciples asked Jesus if He was going to restore the kingdom to Israel, Jesus redirected their focus. He wanted them to concentrate not on political expectations but on the power of the Holy Spirit to be effective witnesses.

Our focus should be on:

1. Trusting that the Father is in complete control
2. Being an effective witness for Christ

We must be careful not to let the things we don't understand rob us of peace and rest. God is still in control, and He wants to fill us with His Holy Spirit.

## **How Does the Holy Spirit Work in Believers' Lives?**

Jesus described the Holy Spirit's work using three key verbs:

1. WITH (para) - The Spirit is with everyone on earth to convict of sin and lead to salvation
2. IN (en) - At salvation, the Spirit comes to dwell inside believers, producing spiritual fruit
3. UPON (epi) - The Spirit rests upon believers for service and purpose

This "upon" experience is what Jesus referred to in Acts 1:8 when He promised power to be His witnesses. Unlike in the Old Testament where the Spirit would come and go, Jesus promised the Spirit would rest upon believers permanently.

The question isn't just whether you have the Holy Spirit, but whether the Holy Spirit has you. When we lack boldness, feel spiritually dry, or seem powerless as witnesses, we often need a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

## **What Does Jesus' Ascension Teach Us?**

As Jesus ascended from the Mount of Olives, the disciples stood gazing upward until angels appeared with an important message: "This same Jesus who is taken up from you into heaven will so come in like manner as you saw Him go."

This teaches us that Jesus will return literally and physically to the same place He left—the Mount of Olives. His return isn't figurative or symbolic but will be as real as His departure.

## **Life Application**

Moving forward in faith requires three key commitments:

1. Move forward in faith by believing in Jesus and His resurrection. Ask yourself: Do I truly believe Jesus is alive and at work in my world today? How does this belief change how I face challenges?
2. Move forward as an effective witness by asking God to baptize and use your life. Consider: When was the last time I asked God to fill me afresh with His Spirit? What opportunities to share Christ am I currently overlooking?
3. Move forward with your eyes fixed on Jesus, knowing He's coming back soon. Reflect: Am I living each day with an awareness of Christ's return? How would my priorities change if I truly believed Jesus could return today?

This week, make a conscious decision to move forward rather than backward or standing still. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you anew each morning, and look for opportunities to be a witness for Christ in your everyday interactions. Remember that the same power that transformed the early church is available to you today.