

14 When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that the people of Samaria had accepted God's message; they sent Peter and John. **15** When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, **16** because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. **17** Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is available to you.

Acts 8 is a significant passage as a believer. The early church was advancing and we read of new believers who have accepted God's message. Peter and John immediately went to meet these new believers. Why? Because they knew that without the Holy Spirit in these young Christians' lives, it would be impossible to live this Christian life. The Holy Spirit is your helper, your encourager and your constant guide no matter what life throws at you.

Acts 8 shows us that the Holy Spirit is:

1. Essential. The early Christian church knew that every believer needs the Holy Spirit in their lives.
2. Free. He is available to all who believe. If you have accepted Jesus, you can receive the Holy Spirit in your life.
3. A Gift. All you need to do is ask. The Holy Spirit is a free gift given from God.

3 As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me? 5 “Who are you, lord?” Saul asked. And the voice replied, “I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! 6 Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

The light is switched on.

There are very few things more stressful than trying to find something in the dark. It is practically impossible. We end up knocking things over or even getting an injury!

Once the lights are turned on, everything becomes clear. Act 9 is a ‘light switch moment’ for Paul on the road to Damascus where he suddenly realizes that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. What was once concealed becomes revealed. Paul’s life is redirected from persecuting the Church to building the Church - he is given purpose and direction.

When we accept Jesus, it’s a light switch moment. He shines his light on areas of brokenness in our lives and shows us where we can grow, change and become like him. We may have been on a road going in the wrong direction but when we accept Jesus, he opens our

spiritual eyes to see clearly. You can ask Jesus to shine his light of discernment, direction and grace on your life every single day. He awakens us to areas his grace can heal, refresh and repurpose.

34 Then Peter replied, “I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism.
35 In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right.
36 This is the message of Good News for the people of Israel—that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

God shows no favoritism.

Acts 10 shows us that the Gospel is available to all – irrespective of background, culture, color or creed. The inclusive and diverse heart of God is revealed through a miraculous story in the early Christian church. God calls a Roman army officer called Cornelius to serve him. This was a problem for the Jews, at the time they were prohibited to associate with Gentiles (v.28) and not only was Cornelius a Gentile, he was also any officer in the army of the Jews’ oppressors! An outsider yet accepted by God.

God ‘goes ahead’ of Cornelius and changes Peter’s heart and perspective. He shows Peter a vision saying ‘Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean’. Peter later declares ‘I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism’.

While Cornelius felt like an outsider, God makes a way through a dream opening the door for him to be part of

the family of God. Peter has the humility, obedience and conviction to listen to God and baptize a Roman Officer. (Such a controversy at the time that he spends most of Acts 11 explaining his actions).

As Christians we are called to bring to Gospel to each heart and life, beckoning a ‘Welcome Home’ to every person. The Gospel breaks division and prejudice in the world. We are equipped to reach those whose stories’ may be different to our own. Like Peter, God wants to continually take us on a journey asking – who is the outsider God has called me to reach today?

28 A prophet named Agabus stood up in one of the meetings and predicted by the Spirit that a great famine was coming upon the entire Roman world. (This was fulfilled during the reign of Claudius.) 29 So the believers in Antioch decided to send relief to the brothers and sisters in Judea, everyone giving as much as they could. 30 This they did, entrusting their gifts to Barnabas and Saul to take to the elders of the church in Jerusalem.

Global pandemics and Godly provision.

Nothing is a surprise to God. In Acts 11, God reveals to a prophet that a famine would come seeking to wipe out the known Roman world. The historian and writer, Luke reveals the famine distressed the whole inhabited world. Historians now tell us that it brought about economic crisis and an increased death toll globally. Sound familiar?

What did the church in Antioch do? They acted, rallied, gave, sent relief and did as much as they could to help those in need. In times of pandemics, famines, war and natural disasters God utilizes his Church and his people to leave a tangible imprint and impact on the world.

Recently, the World Health Organization stated the Coronavirus Pandemic is a 'once-in-a-century health crisis'. If that's the case then like the church in Antioch, we have a 'once-in-a-century opportunity to be the hands and feet of Jesus. To bring hope to those who

need healing, to bring faith to those who are engulfed in fear and to bring God's Grace to those who may be Grieving. In times of crisis, God wants to give you greater purpose in this season of crisis to reach and impact the world. Ask him today to show you where you can be part of his solution.

5 So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. **6** The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. **7** Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Quick, get up!” he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s wrists.

Earnestly pray until the chains break off.

At the beginning of Acts 12 we learn that King Herod has begun persecuting the followers of Jesus and has James put to death. Subsequently Peter is captured and put in prison. Having been shocked by the death of James the church is awakened to a desperate need to pray for his release.

The following verses tell of a miraculous encounter Peter has with an angel on the night before his imminent execution. Peter is bound by chains, guarded by sixteen soldiers and walks free from prison!

As a Christian, you and I must never underestimate the power of prayer. It allows you to encounter miracles! It has the power to break chains and bring personal freedom in your life today.

But don’t be surprised when God answers your prayers! The disciples almost left Peter out in the cold in disbelief that it could really be him!

As a church let us commit to earnestly praying for those who need to see breakthrough in their lives today. What are you praying for today? Don’t stop until the chains break off.

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.

Ready to respond.

Acts 13 takes us in to the next phase of Saul’s ministry. So far the gospel has been preached to ‘Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria’ (Acts 1:8). Now the time has come to take it to ‘the ends of the earth.’

What we observe in these verses is that Saul (who in this chapter becomes the Apostle Paul as we know him) and Barnabas respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit for their next step in this great commission.

Many times in our lives we seek the leading of the Holy Spirit for our next step. It could be a job opportunity, a relationship, a degree, financial wisdom.

Sometimes we can wait for the ‘big booming voice from heaven’ to direct us (which can happen) but more often the Holy Spirit will lead you while you are actively seeking Him.

If you are searching for direction from the Holy Spirit in your life why not commit to the example of these men:

- Worship while you wait on Him
- Fast while you follow Him
- Pray while you pursue Him

Church when the Holy Spirit responds we must be ready to go!

8 In Lystra there sat a man who was lame. He had been that way from birth and had never walked. 9 He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed 10 and called out, “Stand up on your feet!” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

Faith to obey.

Paul and Barnabas continue their journey preaching the gospel, first to the Jews then to the Gentiles until they come to the city of Lystra. As there is no Jewish synagogue they proceed to the centre of the city and begin to preach the gospel. Here they encounter a man who has been lame all his life. He hears of the miraculous and merciful grace of Jesus and is filled with faith to believe that what He has done for others He would certainly do for him. Recognising this Paul commands him to stand to his feet. The lame man has a choice to make; to stand or to stay put.

Have you ever felt the prompting of the Holy Spirit to stand up, stand out, respond to him and yet have hesitated out of fear, doubt or worry?

This man had NEVER known what it was like to stand and yet he had the faith to obey. Had he not he may well have missed his miracle.

Maybe God has called you to make a bold stand today; have faith and obey.