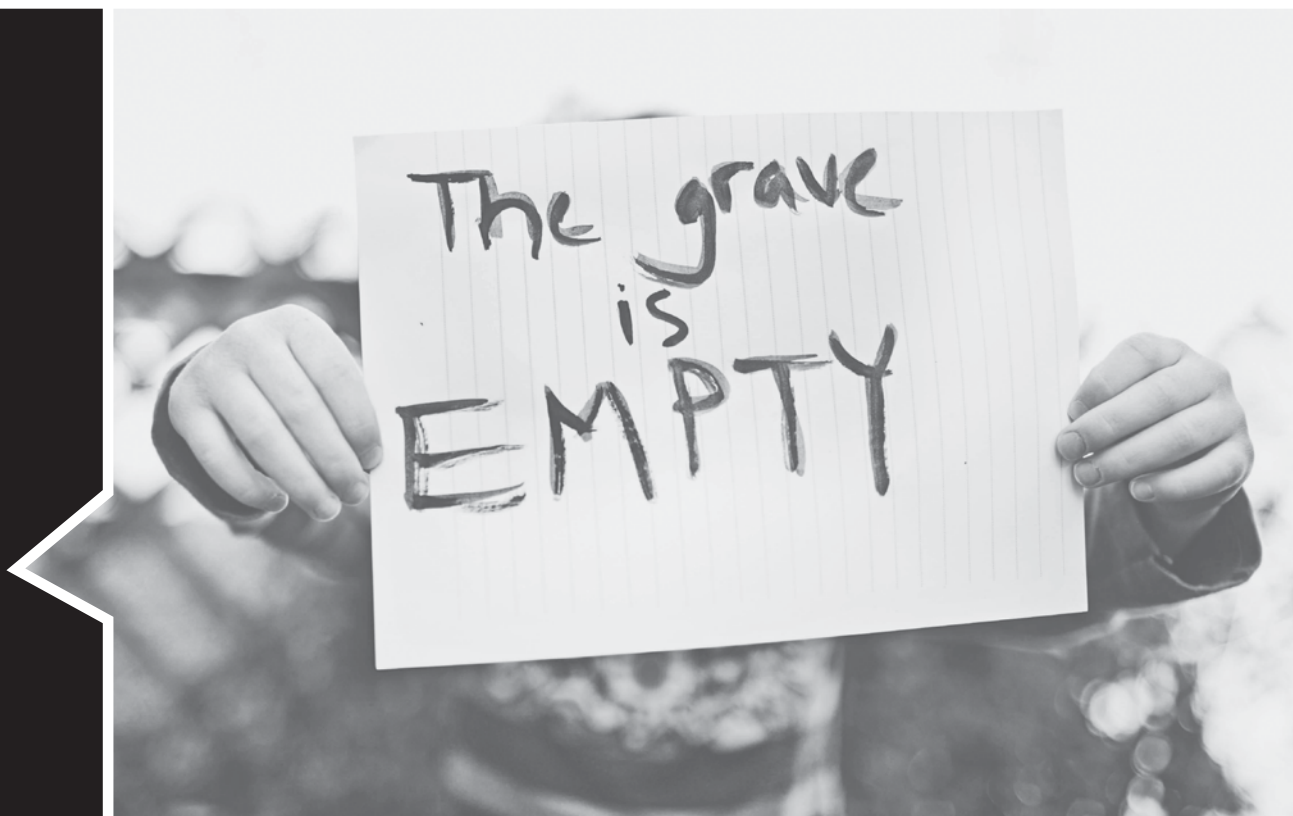


UNSTOPPABLE GOSPEL



Nothing stops our God. Nothing stops His gospel.

Don't write off the church.

Some people already have. They say they like Jesus, but there's no point to the church. As far as they're concerned, the church is a failed institution.

I disagree.

The church is far from a lost cause! In reality, the church is unstoppable because the followers of Christ have been given an unstoppable power—the very Spirit of God. Even more, they've been given an unstoppable mission and message.

Come with me on a journey through the exciting early days of the church. We'll discover what made the early church so powerful—so *unstoppable*. As the Book of Acts opens, we'll see a room full of huddled, scared disciples who were completely powerless and uncertain of the future. But we'll also see these same followers become empowered and effective men and women advancing throughout the world, proclaiming the unstoppable gospel that turned the world upside down.

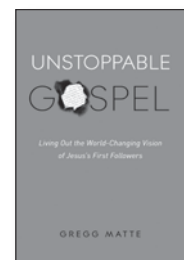
The story of the unstoppable gospel continues today. It is our story as members of the church.

In Christ, we are unstoppable.



GREGG MATTE

Gregg Matte is the senior pastor of Houston's First Baptist Church, a multisite church with five campuses. Before coming to Houston's First in 2004, Gregg founded Breakaway Ministries at Texas A&M University, a weekly gathering that grew to more than 4,000 students. Gregg is the author of *Unstoppable Gospel* (Baker Books, 2015), the book that is the basis for this study.



Unstoppable Gospel

Session 1 **Unstoppable Mission** Acts 1:4-8,12-14

Session 2 **Unstoppable Message** Acts 2:22-24,32-33,36-38

Session 3 **Unstoppable Love** Acts 2:41-47

Session 4 **Unstoppable Opportunities** Acts 3:1-10

Session 5 **Unstoppable Courage** Acts 4:1-3,8-12,19-20

Session 6 **Unstoppable Impact** Acts 17:16-18,22-23,30-31

Find additional tools and resources to support this study, all available online at BibleStudiesForLife.com/AdultExtra. Here are some examples:

Session #1

Opening Assembly

Pop/Rock trio Abandon crosses the line at school with the inclusiveness and grace of the gospel.

Session #6

A Shard of Glass

We may live as strangers in this shattered world, but Christ leads us as contenders for His unshakable kingdom.



SESSION 1

UNSTOPPABLE MISSION

▶ ***The Point***

The Holy Spirit empowers us to spread the gospel.

▶ ***The Passage***

Acts 1:4-8,12-14

▶ ***The Bible Meets Life***

We don't like to wait. Chalk it up to impatience, or maybe it's because we live in a world of instant gratification. But we want what we want when we want it.

- ▶ Two minutes waiting behind another customer at the fast food drive-thru? Too long.
- ▶ Sixty seconds to heat up food in a microwave? Too long.
- ▶ Fifteen seconds waiting for a movie to stream to your TV? Way too long!

At the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus told His disciples to wait. He was going to give them—and us—an incredible gift: the presence and power of His Holy Spirit. The disciples couldn't have fully appreciated what all that meant, but they waited nonetheless.

When the Holy Spirit came, He empowered Jesus' followers for a mission that was unstoppable. From that single location, their mission spread across the world—and continues today.

▶ ***The Setting***

After Jesus rose from the dead, for 40 days He appeared to His disciples, showing Himself to be alive and instructing them on the kingdom of God (see Acts 1:3). Although Jesus was preparing to return to God the Father, as He had promised, the disciples would not be left alone. They would receive “the Father's promise” (Acts 1:4), the Holy Spirit, who would be with them to teach them and empower them. As the time arrived for Jesus to leave His disciples, He spoke with them one last time.

What does the Bible say?

Witnesses (v. 8)—A witness (Greek: *martys*) gives a testimony of something he or she has experienced. Our English word “martyr” comes from the same Greek root.

Acts 1:4-8,12-14

⁴ While He was together with them, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father’s promise. “This,” He said, “is what you heard from Me;

⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked Him, “Lord, are You restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?”

⁷ He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by His own authority.

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called the Mount of Olives, which is near Jerusalem—a Sabbath day’s journey away.

¹³ When they arrived, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James.

¹⁴ All these were continually united in prayer, along with the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brothers.

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

Notes



LEADER PACK: Display Pack Item 6, “Unstoppable Gospel,” to introduce the major theme of this study, along with the specific focus of each session.

DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 67 of the PSG (Personal Study Guide): “**When has something definitely been worth the wait?**”

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Prior to discussing Question 1, give your group

members a small taste of what it feels like to wait. At the normal start time for your gathering, excuse yourself and leave the room for 2-3 minutes. When you return, announce that you wanted to give everyone a chance to experience waiting in real-time before beginning your discussion. Ask what people thought and felt while they waited for you to return.

Note: If your group typically gets started late, or if you don’t have a definite starting time, you could begin discussing Question 1 and then excuse yourself for a few minutes.

GUIDE: Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 68 of the PSG. Introduce the empowering influence of the Holy Spirit by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read on their own.

GUIDE: Call attention to “The Point” on page 68 of the PSG: “**The Holy Spirit empowers us to spread the gospel.**”

PRAY: Transition into the discussion by thanking God for this opportunity to engage and apply His Word. Pray for wisdom as you study the role of the Holy Spirit in empowering you to spread the gospel.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

Want to know about biblical culture, people, archaeology, and history? *Biblical Illustrator* has articles that tie to each session in this study at lifeway.com/BI.

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TIP: When helpful, use this “Notes” column to record additional discussion questions, concepts, and activities that connect the study content with your specific group.

STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Acts 1:4-5

⁴ *While He was together with them, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father’s promise. “This,” He said, “is what you heard from Me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”*

READ: Acts 1:4-5 on page 69 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG). Read the text out loud or ask a volunteer to do so.

Note: The first paragraph on page 89 of this Leader Guide offers some context for these verses.

RECAP: Call attention to the final paragraph on page 69 of the PSG in order to introduce the main theme of Acts 1:4-5.

In Acts 1:4-5, Jesus reminded His followers they soon would receive the gift He had promised earlier: the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost, the Spirit would descend on believers to empower them to preach the gospel. From that moment forward, God’s people would be forever changed in how they related with Him.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 69 of the PSG: **“What do you find difficult about waiting on the Lord?”**

Note: When appropriate, use follow-up questions to encourage group members to share the stories of those times when they were required to wait on the Lord.

GUIDE: Encourage group members to read the illustration at the top of page 70 in the PSG. Affirm that God will always “stick out” whenever He truly lives inside our hearts.

TRANSITION: As we move to verses 6-8, we’ll see Jesus address the disciples’ misconception; we’ll also hear an amazing promise.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

When have you anticipated God working in a specific way?

Acts 1:4-5 Commentary

[Verse 4] After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples on multiple occasions. In one such instance, all of the disciples (except Judas Iscariot, who had committed suicide on the day of Jesus' death) were in Jerusalem. Jesus **was together with them**. This might indicate they shared a meal or it may simply refer to a gathering. Whatever the occasion, Jesus appeared in their midst to prepare them for what was coming. During that meeting He **commanded them not to leave Jerusalem**. Something Jesus had previously taught His disciples was soon to happen in Jerusalem. Thus, the disciples were to **wait** in the holy city for the **Father's promise** to be fulfilled.

[Verse 5] The focus of this promise was the **Holy Spirit**. Though God's people had known about God's Spirit for centuries, their knowledge was more of a distant awareness rather than a personal experience. In their minds, this mysterious Spirit probably seemed to operate unpredictably. Throughout the Old Testament we read accounts of how the Holy Spirit powerfully came upon a specific person at a specific time for a specific purpose. Still, these times were the exception rather than the norm. A special filling from the Spirit was reserved for certain people at certain times, but not for all of God's people all of the time. Even so, God had planned for a change. Centuries before Jesus was born, God decreed that one day His Spirit would not be limited to select persons (see Isa. 32:15; 44:3; Joel 2:28-32).

During His earthly ministry, Jesus had also told His disciples about God's promise. On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus taught the disciples about the coming of the Holy Spirit (see John 14-16). Jesus noted that the Spirit's ministry in the world and among believers would include convicting of sin, revealing truth, counseling and guiding, teaching, and testifying about Jesus. Jesus also emphasized that He would have to go away in order for the Spirit to come. Soon, both events would happen—Jesus' departure and the Spirit's arrival.

During His post-resurrection meeting with them, Jesus helped His disciples understand more about their coming encounter with the Spirit. Jesus related it to a baptism, which many of them probably experienced from John the Baptist. But in contrast to John's baptism **with water**, the disciples would soon **be baptized with the Holy Spirit**. While future believers would continue to follow Jesus' example of physical baptism to identify them as His disciples, they would also experience this spiritual baptism to enable them to live lives of obedience to God's commands and carry out His mission of leading more people to become His disciples. Jesus assured the disciple that **not many days from now** this promise would be fulfilled. Soon all believers would be baptized with God's Spirit. And though Jesus would leave to return to His Father in heaven, the Holy Spirit would remain with believers—living in them—to enable them to accomplish God's purposes.



STUDY THE BIBLE

NOTES

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Acts 1:6-8

***6** So when they had come together, they asked Him, “Lord, are You restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?” **7** He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by His own authority. **8** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

READ: Acts 1:6-8 on page 70 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the first paragraph on page 91 of this Leader Guide to explain the misconception that many Jews in Jesus’ day—including His disciples—believed about the coming of God’s kingdom.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 70 of the PSG: **“What do these verses teach us about God’s mission?”**

Note: Remind group members that these verses don’t just describe the disciples’ mission, but our mission as well.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What circumstances can cause us to doubt we have God’s power within us?

DO: Direct group members to complete the activity “Be My Witnesses” on page 71 of the PSG. If time permits, encourage volunteers to share their responses.



Use the space below to make a prayer list based on Acts 1:8. Fill out the different categories with specific requests you can echo throughout the coming week.

Lord, I’m praying this week that You do the following in my city:

Lord, I’m praying this week that You do the following in my nation:

Lord, I’m praying this week that You do the following in my world:

Lord, I’m praying this week that You do the following in my heart:

TRANSITION: As we conclude with verses 12-14, we’ll see the importance of prayer as we seek to carry out our mission.

Acts 1:6-8 Commentary

[Verse 6] When the disciples met with Jesus, they once again asked about **the kingdom** they anticipated. Like most Jews, they looked forward to a political kingdom where they would be free from the foreign rule they had known for centuries; they especially anticipated a future where everyone would again know the power and glory **Israel** had once experienced under David and Solomon. This was what they expected with Jesus the Messiah on the throne. Now, as the disciples met with Jesus after His resurrection, they again asked about the kingdom that was coming, hoping it was the right **time** for their dream to become reality.

[Verse 7] Jesus didn't reply to the primary focus of their question—their hope for Israel's worldwide prominence. Instead, He emphasized that **times** and **periods** were none of their concern. Jesus noted that the dates God the Father has set are His alone to know (also see Mark 13:32).

[Verse 8] It was important, however, for the disciples to understand the kingdom that was coming and how it impacted them and others. Unlike what the disciples imagined, God's kingdom was different from all earthly kingdoms where powerful human kings sit on thrones in specific places for a limited time. Instead, God's kingdom is about the eternal, immortal, invisible God ruling in human lives. It's about God's Spirit living in those who trust Jesus as Savior and Lord. The kingdom of God is about the **power** of God enabling the people of God to fulfill the mission of God. This power is unlike anything Rome or any other nation has ever possessed. It is the supernatural capability and potential that was experienced in the miracles of Jesus, including His resurrection from death. Jesus promised this same power to His followers.

Note the certainty of Jesus' promise: **you will receive power** and **you will be My witnesses**. Jesus' promise was not a statement of wishful thinking, but rather one of fact; it would happen. The Greek word for "power" is the same root from which we get our English words "dynamic" and "dynamite." This power is a gift God would give to His people through His Spirit. His power was not given for their benefit—so they could be prominent or dominant—but so they could be His **witnesses**. This was also a certainty. Jesus promised to empower His followers to enable them to share their testimony with others.

God's mission involves using His people to invite all of humanity to become part of His family—living in a growing relationship with Him through repentance and faith in Jesus. This mission was to start in **Jerusalem** and to expand throughout **Judea**. But it was not for Jews only. It included the despised people of **Samaria**, considered half-breeds by most Jews. And it also included people in far away lands, Gentiles (non-Jews) in nations all over the globe, even **to the ends of the earth**.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

Acts 1:12-14

¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called the Mount of Olives, which is near Jerusalem—a Sabbath day’s journey away. ¹³ When they arrived, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. ¹⁴ All these were continually united in prayer, along with the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brothers.

READ: Acts 1:12-14 on page 73 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Ask group members to read the bullet list on page 73 of the PSG in order to highlight three important principles from these verses.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 73 of the PSG: **“What are some of the benefits of praying together as a group?”**

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 73 of the PSG: **“What common mission can our group pray for together?”**

Note: Encourage group members to think specifically about a mission that is specific for your church and your community.

RECAP: Read aloud the final paragraph on page 73 of the PSG:

Prayer maximizes “Thee” and minimizes “me.” Prayer says, “My agenda is unimportant, Lord, but Your agenda is all-important.” The reason for so much disunity and disharmony in the church is because many Christians contend for their own agendas, not God’s agenda. When we pray and seek God’s will together, He will unify us and keep us focused on our common center: Jesus the Lord.

GUIDE: Refer back to “The Point” of this session: **“The Holy Spirit empowers us to spread the gospel.”** As time allows, encourage group members to share any final thoughts or questions.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

How is praying with others for a common mission different from your personal prayers?

Acts 1:12-14 Commentary

[Verses 12-13] The disciples' meeting with Jesus and His subsequent ascension to heaven had taken place on **the Mount of Olives**, which was just east of Jerusalem (see Acts 1:9-11). Luke noted it was **a Sabbath day's journey away**, or about three-fourths of a mile. This was simply a Jewish reference of distance and doesn't imply the meeting was on the Sabbath. Once in the city, the eleven disciples went to **the room upstairs where they were staying**. It was likely a large room on the top floor of a large house. The fact that the disciples were staying there suggests it was where they slept and met with other believers.

[Verse 14] One thing that became constant for the disciples following the ascension was **prayer**. They **continually** prayed together. The word *continually* suggests more than just occasional or brief prayers. It pictures them as being devoted to prayer—they were intense and persistent in their praying. This was an example they had seen in Jesus' life and was obviously important for them as well.

Exactly what the disciples prayed is unknown, but they were **united**. This means they had the same heart and commitment, which was to glorify God and fulfill His purpose. They may have prayed for unity (just as Jesus prayed for them on the night before His death—see John 17:20-23). But certainly they experienced unity as a result of their ongoing praying together.

There were more than just the eleven disciples in that upper room, however. Luke mentioned **the women**, likely a reference to those who had followed Jesus, had been there at His crucifixion, and had even prepared Jesus for His proper burial. The women could have also included any wives of the disciples. Luke noted that **Mary the mother of Jesus** and **His brothers** also joined the disciples during that time. Mark 6:3 notes that Jesus had four brothers and at least two sisters. These were the natural children of Mary and Joseph, so technically Jesus was their half-brother.

The emphasis of Jesus and the example of His followers in the days before Pentecost remind us of what we as believers are to do and how we are to do it in our day. Our priority is to be witnesses for Jesus—sharing the truth about God, sin, and salvation, and our testimony of what we have experienced (forgiveness of sins and eternal life) through faith in Christ. This is what we have been empowered by the Holy Spirit to do. But we don't do this alone—prayer keeps us connected with God so we can receive and walk in His wisdom, strength, and guidance for the mission. And unity with other believers in fellowship and in prayer gives us the community we need for support and the encouragement we need to keep moving forward as we work together to spread the gospel.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 74 of the PSG. Encourage them to consider the following options for obeying Acts 1:8 in the coming week:



Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

- ▶ **Accept the mission.** Recognize that Jesus has commanded you to be His witness wherever you go and wherever He sends you. Verbally commit yourself to His service.
- ▶ **Embrace the gift.** Begin each day by submitting to the Holy Spirit as your only source of strength and guidance. Pray that He would give you wisdom and power to accomplish God’s mission in your life.
- ▶ **Pray together.** Gather an extra time as a group this week. Make prayer the sole focus and action of that gathering.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the Conclusion from page 74 of the PSG:

God’s mission is unstoppable—and so is the Spirit He’s placed within you. Remember that you have a part to play in that mission. Remember also that it all begins with prayer.

PRAY: Conclude by expressing thanks for the blessing of the Holy Spirit. Pray that each person present would be attentive to the Spirit’s leading in order to take advantage of the Spirit’s power in your lives.



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