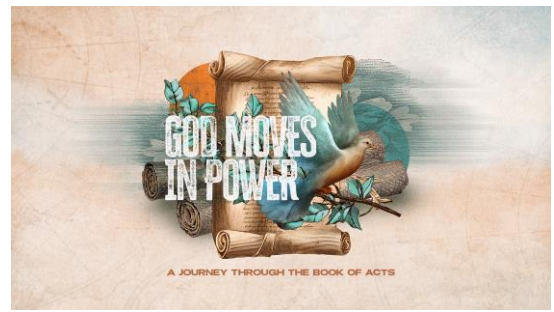


Group Discussion Guide | October 11

God Moves in Power through the Church

Series overview and leader instructions



Overview

Our current sermon series, “God Moves in Power,” is a journey through the book of Acts, where we witness the Holy Spirit at work through prayer, the gospel, the Church, and ordinary people. As we explore the story of the early church, we’ll discover that the same God who moved powerfully then is still moving today. This series will challenge and encourage us to live with bold faith, expectant prayer, and a willingness to join God’s ongoing mission in the world. The story of Acts is far from over and we’re invited to be a part of it.

Note: This series will be a thematic walk through the Book of Acts rather than a chapter by chapter or verse-by-verse study.

Bible Lab

Each week, in addition to sermon discussion questions, groups are invited to participate in “Bible Lab,” an interactive Scripture reading experience. Your group will read a different text each time you gather, but the questions you ask will be the same, inviting you to consider what you notice about God, humanity, and yourself in each passage. By providing the same questions each week, we hope to offer a Bible-reading strategy that puts the emphasis first on God and the church/others before drawing a personal application.

It could be tempting for your group to skip the Bible Lab, but we *strongly* encourage you to engage with it each week, allowing God’s Word to form your group and each person in it.

Reading Plan

We have created a reading plan to accompany this sermon series. You can find it here: [Acts Series Resources](#). You can download the reading plan or subscribe to receive the daily devotional guide each week, which contains the reading plan and reflection questions.

Consider committing to completing the reading plan as a group. Here are questions you can use (during your life group time, over a meal, or however you choose) to reflect on the reading plan each week:

- As you read, what resonated with you?
- What questions came up in your mind?
- What challenged you from God’s Word?

Opening reflection questions (10 minutes)

This week we will explore how, as the church grew beyond the Jewish people and included more Gentiles, the leaders met together to discern how to both theologically and practically create space in the house of God for all the people of God.

In Acts 15:9 Peter says that God “Did not discriminate between us and them [Jew and Gentile], for he purified their hearts by faith.” Take a moment to reflect:

- Have you ever wondered, “Do I really belong here?” Think of a time when you entered a church, a group, or a community, and you wrestled with that question. What helped you realize that you did? What made you feel like you didn’t?

Bible Lab (20 minutes)

All through the God Moves in Power series, we’ll be spending time each week in what we’re calling “Bible Lab.” Bible Lab consists of three “movements.” In the first movement, we will read the passage out loud, paying attention to what is happening in the passage. In the second movement, we’ll read it out loud again, noticing what it teaches about God, people, and ourselves. In the third movement, we will silently read the passage and share what next step the passage has for us. **Note:** *See the last page of this document for a guide you can provide your group members if desired. You could print one for each person, collect them after Bible Lab, and reuse the same guide each week.*

Movement 1

*Invite everyone to turn to **Acts 15:6-21**.*

The first time through, we want to get an overview. As we listen, ask yourself:

- What is going on in this passage?
- What caught your attention?
- What questions arise as you listen?

Read Acts 15:6-21 out loud or invite someone else to do so. When you are finished, discuss your group’s answers to the questions above. Feel free to break into groups of 2–3.

Movement 2

The second time through, we want to consider what the passage reveals about God and His people. As we listen, ask yourself:

- What does this passage show you about God? The work of the Holy Spirit?
- What do these verses reveal to us about the body of Christ, the Church?

Read Acts 15:6-21 out loud or invite someone else to do so. When you are finished, discuss your group's answers to the questions above. Feel free to break into groups of 2–3.

Movement 3

Each of us will now take a few moments to read Acts 15:6-21 silently to ourselves. As you read, prayerfully consider this question:

- Lord, what are You inviting me to believe, receive, or do in response to this passage?

Allow time for everyone to read and reflect. Then invite anyone who would like to share a brief response.

*When the time of sharing is done, pray a short prayer. You may use these words based on Galatians 3:28 or something similar: **“Lord, thank you for the non-discriminatory gift of your grace through our Savior Jesus Christ. Thank you for the oneness we have in Jesus—that there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, and neither male nor female. Amen.”***

Discussion of sermon and Scripture (20 minutes)

In his sermon, Pastor Emerson shared how the key issue at stake in Acts 15 was how to accept and welcome the Gentile believers.

- According to the text, what were the Jewish believers wanting the Gentile Christians to do? Why was that faulty thinking? What was the Church's response?
- Why might it be important to distinguish between doctrine, decree, and discretion?
- Have you ever surrendered something that was legitimately a preference or discretionary for the sake of love and unity? Explain. Has anyone ever done that towards you?

Throughout this chapter, we see the Church navigate the Jew/Gentile relationship by discerning between what is doctrine, what is decree, and what is discretionary.

Reminder:

Doctrine: Central, unchangeable truths of the Christian faith to which we submit.

Decree: Rules for the life of God's people provided by church leaders and based on sound doctrine that believers agree to abide by for the sake of unity and order.

Discretionary: Topics about which wise and godly believers, seeking to follow biblical wisdom, may reach different conclusions and follow different paths.

- Have you ever been tempted to turn something discretionary into doctrine or something doctrinal into something discretionary? Explain.
- Why do we find it so difficult sometimes to discern between doctrine and discretion?
- What is the difference between saying “I am allowed to do this” and “I should do this?” What kinds of important filters should we be using when navigating this tension (e.g. Christian love, wisdom, etc.)?

Take a moment and imagine what it must have been like to be a Jewish believer in Antioch and to be a Gentile believer in Antioch. Upon receiving the Jerusalem Council’s decree, there were likely some Jewish believers who were upset and some Gentile believers who were too.

- Imagine you find yourself in a disagreement with someone. What feelings or tensions begin to naturally arise in you? What assumptions do you tend to make about that person? Explain.
- What postures of the heart (e.g. patience) would it be good to cultivate when it comes to living in unity despite potential disagreement? What intentional practices are needed in an environment like this (e.g. forgiveness)?
- Where do you personally need to become better at distinguishing between what God has commanded, what the Church has wisely decided, and what Christians are free to discern for themselves?

Prayer and upcoming events (15 minutes)

To close your time together, spend a few moments in prayer. Thank God for the ways He is already at work and ask Him to continue moving in power through His people. Pray for the wisdom and love to live in unity with other believers based on the solid foundation of sound doctrine. You may even use 1 Timothy 3:16 as a basis for this prayer:

“Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great: He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.”

You may choose to break into groups of 2–3 to pray together or remain as a whole group.

Upcoming Events

- Created to Serve Life Group Content

Created to Serve is a booklet designed to help people discover how God has uniquely shaped them to contribute to His Kingdom through their spiritual gifts, life experiences, passions, skills, and abilities.

Groups will engage with Created to Serve during the weeks of **October 25** and **November 1**. A workbook with guided readings and reflection questions will be offered to help each person prayerfully consider how God has wired and gifted them.

Then, when your group gathers, you'll have the opportunity to discuss what you're noticing and how God may be inviting you to respond.

Leaders can pick up the Created to Serve Guides on Sunday, October 18.

- Thursday Night Services kick off on October 22!

Bible Lab Questions

The following may be used to guide each week's Bible Lab time.

Movement 1

The first time through this week's Scripture, we want to get an overview. As we listen, ask yourself:

- What is going on in this passage?
- What caught your attention?
- What questions arise as you listen?

Listen as the passage is read out loud then discuss your answers to the questions above.

Movement 2

The second time through, we want to consider what the passage reveals about God and His people. As we listen, ask yourself:

- What does this passage show you about God? The work of the Holy Spirit?
- What do these verses reveal to us about the body of Christ, the Church?

Listen as the passage is read out loud then discuss your answers to the questions above.

Movement 3

Each of us will now take a few moments to read the passage silently to ourselves. As you read, prayerfully consider this question:

- Lord, what are You inviting me to believe, receive, or do in response to this passage?

After a time of reflection, everyone will be given the opportunity to share their response.