

# Devoted

An ASMA Resource for Summer 2021

A Series of Small Group and  
Self-Access Bible Studies in  
the book of Acts, looking at  
the early Church and insights  
for us today.



# Devoted

## Introduction

Hello and a very warm welcome to this set of six sessions under the title of Devoted, in which we'll look at the early Church in the book of Acts and insights for us today. The course is shaped around Acts 2:42-47, where we hear what the early Church 'devoted' themselves to. It's great that you're able to access this material along with lots of others across NW Bristol and wider afield.

Flexibility is what this course is designed for. You might be using this material over six weeks in the summer term, or you might prefer to do the six sessions over six consecutive days, or you might be using this material at another point in the year. Whenever you're reading this, it's great that you've been able to make use of the material here.

You might be accessing it as part of a small discussion group. You might be accessing it on your own, or as a conversation starter with a friend. You might like to discuss it online or over the telephone, or you might choose to discuss it in person - outdoors perhaps. However, you're using this, we hope it will kick-start some helpful and thought-provoking, even life-changing, conversations.

Each session is based around 4 Ws:



Welcome - becoming aware of others, of God, and of his world;



Worship - bringing ourselves before God;



Word - looking at what God says to us in the Bible - his word;



Witness - thinking creatively about how we might respond to God's word to us and make a difference.

The sessions contain plenty of flexible ideas. It might be that there are too many for the time you've got. No worries! The course is written for you to be able to miss things out/tailor to your needs and circumstances. That's all part of being creative! We do recommend, however, that you do something from each of the 4 Ws each time that you access the course - a balanced diet is a healthy one. We have also produced another version of this course, trimmed down and containing just one or two elements for each of the 4 Ws. If you are meeting for a shorter length of time or think less content may work better for you or your group, do check out that version too. (Although if possible, we would suggest looking at the full version to select for yourself what would be most helpful for you or your group).

Thank you for using this material. As you do so, we pray that God will bless you and our churches abundantly. May we be a people devoted to each other and all that God calls us to together.

# SESSION ONE – Fellowship



## Welcome

- Whether you are with a group, another or alone, you may want to start your session by praying, dedicating this time to God and asking him to be speaking to you.
- We each will have stories of how we came to be where we are today, how we became connected to this church, group or community. If you are alone, you may want to spend a little bit of time thinking back over how you came to be connected here today. And if you are in a group, you might like to each share briefly how you found yourselves here. It can often be inspiring to hear how God draws us together into fellowship, each from our different lives.
- Ice-breaker question – Where do you feel a sense of belonging? Why?



## Worship

- As we start this course across ASMA together, spend some time in prayer for your church and other churches across the Avonside Mission Area. Thanking God, praying for ongoing ministries and upholding each other in prayer.



## Word

- There are a number of different questions and avenues to explore here. Don't feel you need to do all the questions but feel free to pick the questions that would be most helpful for you and your group.
- 1) The course is shaped around Acts 2:42-47 where we hear what the early Church 'devoted' themselves to. Read the passage.
    - a. What stands out to you?
    - b. If you were to write a similar description of your church, what would you include?
    - c. What is your church 'devoted' to?
  - 2) The church is described in the Bible in different ways – for example; 'a family' in Ephesians 2:19-22, 'the body of Christ' in 1 Corinthians 12:12-30, or even operating like a network in Romans 16...
    - a. What do you think these images tell us about the church?
    - b. Do you find any of these images particularly helpful?
    - c. In what ways do you see them lived out in your church?
    - d. How would you define 'church'?
  - 3) As church, we are a group of individuals that come together under one Father. We exist as the worldwide church and as a whole, we reflect the kingdom of God. What do you think makes the church distinctive?
  - 4) The believers in this passage from Acts seem to have a real sense of togetherness and fellowship, but as we look forward we see they aren't always in agreement. Read Acts 15:36-41. Here Paul and Barnabas have a disagreement and decide to part ways. In the church today, there are also times when we disagree and have different ideas, convictions or opinions. What do you think it looks like for the church to disagree well in a way that honours God, each other and our unity in Christ?



## **Witness**

- Is there a particular element of church life discussed during the session that you feel passionate about? How do you feel God is calling you to activate and live out this passion?
- Do you regularly pray for the life of the church? Could you commit to praying for the church each day for the duration of this course?
- We also read in Acts 2 that their community continued to grow. The church is designed to draw others in to connect with Jesus, how can we be inviting others to join us?

# **SESSION TWO – Prayer**



## **Welcome**

- Whether you are with a group, another or alone, you may want to start your session by praying, dedicating this time to God and asking him to be speaking to you.
- Can you think of a time that prayer transformed a situation? If you're with others, you may like to share these stories.
- Ice-breaker question – Where do you go if you are in need of advice?



## **Worship**

- Spend a moment settling yourself and becoming aware of God's presence with you. Think back over your day/week, what are you thankful for? What have been the challenges? What is on your mind? How are you feeling today? Be honest with God and bring these things to him in prayer.



## **Word**

- There are a number of different questions and avenues to explore here. Don't feel you need to do all the questions but feel free to pick the questions that would be most helpful for you and your group.
  - 1) Throughout the book of Acts, we see that prayer underpins all that they do. For example, see Acts 1:14, 1:24, 2:42, 6:4, 6:6, 8:15, 9:40, 10:2, 12:5, 13:3, 14:23, 16:25, 28:8 – you get the point! The early Church are constantly turning to God in prayer, are we constantly turning to God in prayer?
  - 2) Read Acts 4:1-31.
    - a. What is going on here?
    - b. What is Peter and John's response to those in the Sanhedrin?
    - c. What do you notice about how Peter and John pray?
  - 3) Peter and John seem to pray, not for their own safety or comfort, but for their boldness to continue to serve God. They also pray out of a place of knowledge of who God is and what he has done.
    - a. How do you pray?
    - b. How do we as the church pray?

- c. Do we pray for our own comfort and will or for God's purposes to prevail?
  - d. Do we pray aware of who God is and what he has done?
- 4) We also see God's Spirit at work throughout Acts. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is poured out and promised to all who believe (Acts 2:38-39). It is his Spirit that makes the early Church effective and it is the same today, apart from God we can do nothing.
- a. How dependant are we on God's Spirit at work in all that we do as church?
  - b. Are we led by the prompting of God's Spirit?
  - c. What are the warning signs that we are trying to do things in our own strength?



### **Witness**

- What are you currently praying for? What is your current pattern of prayer? What gets in the way of you spending time with God in prayer? How might you solve this?
- Earlier we considered the warning signs of trying to do things in our own strength, was there any that rang true for you? How might you realign yourself with God in this?
- What situations do you see in your church, local community, city and world right now that you feel the church could be offering before God in prayer? Could you commit to seeking God for those things?
- Consider how you and your church make decisions, what role does prayer play in this?

## **SESSION THREE – Living generously**



### **Welcome**

- Whether you are with a group, another or alone, you may want to start your session by praying, dedicating this time to God and asking him to be speaking to you.
- Think about a time you had a need that was met by someone else, what happened? Did you have a sense of God at work in meeting this need? If you're in a group, you might like to share your thoughts.
- Ice-breaker question – Can you think of a time when someone has shown generosity to you? What impact did that have?



### **Worship**

- Spend some time in sung worship. You might like to listen to a song or hymn on YouTube – perhaps 'How Deep the Father's Love for Us'. Allow your worship to lead you to express your thankfulness to God. If you're in a group, you might like to say short prayers of thankfulness in a time of open prayer.



### **Word**

- There are a number of different questions and avenues to explore here. Don't feel you need to do all the questions but feel free to pick the questions that would be most helpful for you and your group.
- 1) Read Acts 4:32-35. This passage speaks of dramatically communal living, giving and responding to the needy.
- a. What might we take, if anything, from this passage for our context today?
  - b. How might we be encouraged to live sacrificially for the benefit of the whole?

- c. What might it mean to be good stewards of what God has given us?
- 2) In the context of living and giving in this sacrificial way, the passage says ‘with great power, the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord.’ Do we think the way we live and give impacts how people receive us when we share about Jesus?
- 3) It also speaks of ‘God’s grace being so powerfully at work in them all’. What might this mean? How might our living be in response to God’s grace?
- 4) Now read Acts 6:1-7.
  - a. What needs did the church feel called to respond to?
  - b. How did they ensure each need is met?
  - c. What is the impact of their actions?
- 5) Jesus demonstrated to the disciples a ministry of servanthood.
  - a. Building on these ideas, how might the church be a ‘servant’?
  - b. Who are we called to serve?
  - c. How can we best do this?



## **Witness**

- What gifts do you have? How do you, or could you, use them to serve within the context of church?
- What are the needs in the community around you? How could the church be responding to those needs?
- What might it look like for you to live and give generously with your gifts, time, resources?

# **SESSION FOUR – Discipleship**



## **Welcome**

- Whether you are with a group, another or alone, you may want to start your session by praying, dedicating this time to God and asking him to be speaking to you.
- Can you remember a time someone taught you a new skill? How did they teach you? How much time did they invest in your learning?
- Ice-breaker question – How do you best learn? What helps you to grow in knowledge or skill?



## **Worship**

- Spend some time meditating on John 13:34-35, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (NIV) If you’re with a group, share with each other any reflections or insights God’s Spirit brought to you as you pondered on these verses. Spend some time praying into this, asking God to guide us in living this out in our communities.



## **Word**

- There are a number of different questions and avenues to explore here. Don't feel you need to do all the questions but feel free to pick the questions that would be most helpful for you and your group.

- 1) Read Acts 8:26-40. What stands out to you?
- 2) In verse 29, we see that Phillip follows the Spirit's lead.
  - a. Do you feel the Spirit prompting you in your life?
  - b. How easy do you find it to be obedient?
- 3) Phillip goes on to help the eunuch to understand more of the scriptures and Good News of Jesus and this results in him being baptised. In what ways can we help each other to grow in understanding and therefore faith in Jesus?
- 4) Read Acts 16:1-5. This is the beginning of Paul and Timothy's partnership (we hear more throughout Paul's letters) where they travelled, worked and lived alongside each other. This is one model of intense personal discipleship, but as church, we are community of disciples, also committed to living alongside each other, learning, encouraging, challenging and investing in each other.
  - a. How do we help each other to grow in discipleship?
  - b. How are you being discipled?
  - c. Who and what has been influential in your discipleship?
  - d. Who has been a 'Paul' to you and helped you to grow?
  - e. Who is like a 'Timothy' to you, who are you investing in?
- 5) Disciples are people who follow Jesus and want to stay close to him to learn, grow and become more like him. Discipleship often starts before someone makes a commitment to follow Jesus with their whole lives, how does your church invest in discipling those who are not yet committed followers of Jesus?



## **Witness**

- Do you have any questions about faith you'd like to explore? Where and with whom are you able to do this?
- Earlier, we considered those in our lives we invest in, who are like a 'Timothy'... if you weren't aware of anyone you are currently investing in, you might feel led to ask God who you could be spending time with and helping to nurture the faith of.
- We also considered the question, 'how are you being discipled?' Reflecting on this once more, are there any areas you feel led to grow in and spend more time on? What might you do about this? Is there a 'Paul' you know of who is more mature in their faith and could help you to grow?

# **SESSION FIVE – Sharing their faith**



## **Welcome**

- Whether you are with a group, another or alone, you may want to start your session by praying, dedicating this time to God and asking him to be speaking to you.
- Whether you'd consider yourself a Christian or not, think of a time when you've been able to share something of your faith journey with someone else. If you're in a group, you might like to share these experiences with each other.
- Ice-breaker question – What do you think of when you hear the word 'evangelism'?



## Worship

- Spend some time writing a letter to God and praying it through. If you're in a group, you might like to share anything that stood out for you as you shared your thoughts with God.



## Word

- There are a number of different questions and avenues to explore here. Don't feel you need to do all the questions but feel free to pick the questions that would be most helpful for you and your group.
- 1) Throughout Acts, we see examples of the early Church proclaiming the Good News of Jesus and inviting others to join them in knowing and worshipping Jesus. Read Acts 17:16-34.
  - a. What strikes you from this passage?
  - b. How does Paul go about communicating his faith in Jesus?
- 2) In verse 22, Paul states that he has 'looked carefully at [their] objects of worship.' Here, he is starting where the people are and listening first.
  - a. What might we think of as the 'objects of worship' in our culture?
  - b. How might we create a connection between those things and God?
- 3) As the church, in what ways do we communicate God's good news?
  - a. How could we grow in this?
- 4) The church in Acts is also continually looking and moving outward to engage with different people and communities. We live out our faith in different places too – church, work, family, wider community etc.
  - a. Think about all the different 'spheres' you live in, what opportunities do you find you have in each of these spaces to share your faith?
  - b. How easy/difficult do you find it to talk about Jesus?



## Witness

- We read in the Bible that God wants all people to come to know him (e.g. 1 Timothy 2:3-4, 2 Peter 3:9). Ask God to bring to mind a few people who you could pray would come to know him. How could you begin/continue to share something of your experience of Jesus with them?
- We communicate who God is not just through our words, but also by how we live. What do you want your life to communicate about God? How can you be more obedient to this?
- Sometimes when we chat with others about Jesus, they might ask why we believe. If you aren't sure what you'd say, maybe you'd like to have a go at writing your testimony (meaning to write the story of how you came to give your life to Jesus or of your faith journey so far).

# SESSION SIX – Signs and Wonders



## Welcome

- Whether you are with a group, another or alone, you may want to start your session by praying, dedicating this time to God and asking him to be speaking to you.



- Have you ever been lost? What role, if any, did signs play in helping you to find your way again?
- Ice-breaker question – Where have you seen God at work around you in recent times?



## Worship

- Spend some time in sung worship. You might like to listen to a song or hymn on YouTube – perhaps ‘King of Kings, Majesty’. Allow your worship to lead you to express your thankfulness to God. If you’re in a group, you might like to say short prayers of thankfulness in a time of open prayer.



## Word

- There are a number of different questions and avenues to explore here. Don't feel you need to do all the questions but feel free to pick the questions that would be most helpful for you and your group.
  - 1) Read Acts 3:1-26.
    - a. What do you notice from this passage?
    - b. What is the response to the healing?
  - 2) Peter prays for the lame beggar and he is healed.
    - a. Do we invite God to be at work in our lives and situations and those of the people around us?
    - b. Do we pray for ‘signs and wonders’?
    - c. What stops us from praying for miracles?
  - 3) The beggar responds by praising God and Peter goes on to ensure that the people watching also know God is the source of this miracle. When we see God at work around us, what is our response?
  - 4) Signs often exist to point to the presence of something else or to communicate something. It seems that the point of verses 1-10 (the miracle/sign) is to point to verses 12-26 (who Jesus is and salvation through him). What then might the ‘signs and wonders’ we see in this passage, throughout Acts and today be pointing to?
  - 5) The church as a whole also exists as a ‘sign’ designed to point to Jesus.
    - a. How do we do this, both as individuals and as the collective church?
    - b. What might people understand of the Gospel from experiencing your church community?
    - c. What aspect of the Good News would you like to point your community to?
  - 6) In pointing to Jesus, signs and wonders also point to our redemption and one day God making ‘everything new’ (Revelation 21) We know that miracles exist within this bigger picture of God’s story, but sometimes miracles don’t happen and this can be extremely painful and difficult. How do we keep going as Christians when God doesn't seem to be answering our prayers, especially on things which would seem to be really important to him and us?



## Witness

- How easy do you find it to be attentive to God at work around you? How could you become more aware of God? These moments in our lives can build our faith and the faith of others when we share them. Maybe you’d like to consider starting to note down these moments to look back on.
- How can we be more expectant that God will move with power in our lives and communities? How can we pray more boldly? Could we pray for more opportunities to pray for ‘signs and wonders’?