

UNSTOPPABLE

Acts 18-28

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UNSTOPPABLE: ACTS 18-28

At Salt Church we're praying for a flood of lifelong disciples of Jesus across the Illawarra and beyond. That's not a mission we invented. It's the mission Jesus sends all his disciples on. It's the story of Acts. So we want to learn from Acts: what is the gospel we're meant to share, how are we meant to share it, what response should we expect to see when we share it, and who should we trust for it to have an impact.

The biggest message of the book is that the gospel is unstoppable, simply because it's God's message and it's God who is growing his church. As one of the Jewish leaders says while interrogating the apostles:

"Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God." Acts 5:38-39

DATE	BIBLE	DATE	BIBLE
31 Jul-6 Aug	Acts 18:1-17	28 Aug-3 Sep	Grow
7-13 Aug	Acts 18:18-19:7	4-10 Sep	Acts 21:1-14
14-20 Aug	Acts 19:8-20	11-17 Sep	Acts 21:17-24:27
21-27 Aug	Acts 19:21-41	18-24 Sep	Acts 25:1-26:32

USING THESE NOTES

LEADER + MEMBER BOOKLETS:

Starting with this Acts series, we'll now have 2 booklets: one for Small Group members and one for Small Group Leaders. What's the difference? The leaders' booklet has answers! Everything in *italics* in the leaders' booklet is *not* in the members booklet.

THE CODE:

In these notes we're using this symbol-based code...

→ **Simpler:** questions with this arrow symbol → trace 1 idea through a passage. So they're great if you have time pressures, less mature Christians in your group, or just want to unpack and apply 1 big idea.

++ **Bonus:** questions with this plus symbol ++ fill-in the picture more. So they're great if you want to dig deeper or explore a few extra ideas. You don't need to ask every bonus question; just pick the best ones.

LCOMA:

These notes use a bible reading approach called LCOMA...

Launch: This introduces the topic you'll unpack & gets everyone talking.

Context: This is about seeing how this passage fits in the book. What must we know from context to understand this piece properly?

Observe: This is about getting an overview of what the passage says.

Meaning: This is about deciding what big idea/s the author is explaining, what does it mean and why does it matter.

Apply: This is about reflecting on how the passage impacts your life – your head (beliefs), heart (emotions) and hands (actions).

THE GOAL:

Remember, the point of a bible discussion is - to discuss the bible. It's not to ask every question in the notes and tick them all off. These notes will help you dig into the bible but don't let them get in the way of the actual goal – wrestling with the bible together, loving it and living it out.

MISSION IN SMALL GROUPS:

As we read story after story in Acts of God saving people by his gospel, it'll be super helpful for us to pray God would do the same for people we know. Plus, as we see the courage of the first followers of Jesus it'll stir us to be bold and courageous in sharing the gospel too. So, kicking off after Grow (on Wed 30th Aug), there'll be time each week to share stories about, and to pray for, people we know who don't yet know Jesus. All the info you need for this is in these notes too.

OVERVIEW OF ACTS

How Luke and Acts fit together

Acts is the sequel to Luke; both are written by the same author and for a Gentile Christian, Theophilus. The focus of volume 1 (Luke's Gospel) is to show us the historical Jesus, who is the promised Saviour and King, who had to *'suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem'* (Luke 24:46-47). The focus of volume 2 (Acts) is the next stage of God's work through His Son, as His gospel spreads and the Church grows.

The book is often called the "Acts of the Apostles", but that's not a super helpful description. Luke's way less interested in highlighting the Apostles and far more interested in the ongoing ministry of Jesus, who works in the world by His Spirit, and who's actively saving people through gospel about Him. Luke reminds Theophilus: *'In my former book... I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven'* (Acts 1:1-2). Acts tells us the ministry of Jesus hasn't ended; it's only just begun!

The Structure of Acts

The last thing Jesus says to his disciples before ascending is: *'you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth'* (1:8). This is both the mission statement and the structural key to the book.

Acts is the story of how the gospel is sent out, carried by messengers, empowered by the Holy Spirit. As a big picture overview, Chapters 1-7 record the unstoppable gospel's impact throughout Jerusalem, despite the rise of opposition. Chapters 8-12 show the gospel's impact into Judea, Samaria and eventually into the Gentile world. Chapters 13-28 focus on Paul's three missionary journeys, where the gospel travels all the way to Rome. The book ends there, but the preaching of the gospel doesn't.

This fuller breakdown of Acts comes from David Peterson. He shows how these 8 sections in Acts conclude with a statement about the main theme of Acts – the relentless growth and advance of the gospel / the word, which comes as God and His Church overcome external and internal threats.

1. The Mission Plan of the Risen Lord (1:1–14)
2. The Word in Jerusalem (1:15–6:7)
3. The Word Goes Out from Jerusalem (6:8–9:31)
4. The Word Advances in Judea and Syria (9:32–12:25)
5. The Word Goes to Cyprus and Asia Minor (13:1–16:5)
6. The Word Goes to Europe (16:6–18:22)
7. The Word in Ephesus: Climax of Paul's Mission (18:23–20:38)
8. Paul's Final Journey: To Jerusalem and Rome (21:1–28:31)

The Big Message and Point of Acts

The history recorded by Luke shows again and again the intense opposition and persecution God's people face, yet how the message they preach continues to go out and cannot be stopped. They carry the news:

'God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah', and 'Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved' (2:36, 4:12).

That news rings out to the ends of the earth, and it is unstoppable. The 2 big messages of Acts are that 1) *the gospel is unstoppable*, and 2) that God is at work acting through His people. God *will* save through the message of Jesus, the Church *will* grow and be strengthened in spite of seemingly overwhelming persecution and potential divisions. This growth is inevitable because God cannot be stopped. Incredible pictures of the spread of the gospel and growth of the church come as summaries all throughout Acts:

'About 3000 were added to their number that day' (2:41)

'So the word of God spread' (6:7)

'the church throughout Judea, Galilee & Samaria enjoyed a time of peace' (9:31)

'The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord' (11:21)

'So the churches were strengthened in the faith & grew daily in numbers' (16:5)

The book ends with Paul under house arrest in Rome, which is the centre of the Gentile world. Luke tells us:

'For two whole years Paul stayed there... and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance!' (Acts 28:30-31).

In one sense, the gospel has reached the ends of the earth: from the Jewish capital Jerusalem to the Gentile capital Rome.

But in another sense, the work has only just begun... Today the church is under fire, numbers are declining, Jesus is less and less relevant to our culture, it's hard to be on Mission. So we need to see from Acts that the message we believe and hold out to people in the Illawarra is unstoppable.

Bonus: Other Big Themes

As well as that overarching point and the themes that make it up, there's a number of other important themes in Acts for us to learn from.

- The need to trust that the sovereign God will always fulfil His purposes.
- The need to call on Christ alone for salvation.
- Jew and Gentiles full inclusion in the Church, and the necessity of unity.
- Suffering and opposition as the normal expectation for those who witness to Jesus.
- Understanding Peter's and Paul's ministries in founding the church, and hearing their words (as well as those of the other biblical writers) across the rest of the NT as the words of the risen Lord Jesus.
- Understanding the age we're in: we continue the Lord Jesus' mission while we wait for his return.
- Understanding the role of the Holy Spirit in mission: to give new birth / spiritual baptism to people who were unbelievers, and then to empower, strengthen and guide Christians to share about Jesus.
- Understanding how to read Acts: as descriptive history of a unique moment in salvation history, rather than a proscriptive explanation of what to expect the Christian life or mission to look like.
- Realising Acts doesn't teach 'hyper-calvinism', loosely defined (at it's worst) as the idea that: since God will save people, therefore I don't need to do anything, God will save without me. Instead, people are involved in all the things that happen in Acts. God Acts through His people – God is sovereign, but chooses to work in and through His people, and so we are responsible for our actions and decisions under the ultimate plan, purposes and hand of God.

ACTS 18:1-17 • 31 JUL-6 AUG

PRAY TO START: Please encourage, correct and teach us as we read Acts.

LAUNCH:

→ Our new series is in the last 1/3 of Acts. How do you feel about the book of Acts and this series? Excited / nervous? Why, why not?

CONTEXT:

→ Tell me everything you know about the book of Acts. Go!

++ Watch the bible project 'Book of Acts Summary' video [part 1](#) and [part 2](#)

READ: Acts 18:1-17

OBSERVATION

→ What does Paul do when he arrives in Corinth?

→ What responses do people make to Paul and his message?

→ Why does Paul stay in Corinth for a relatively long time?

MEANING:

→ From 18:10, how does God know who his people are in Corinth?

→ What do you think it means when the bible says God pre-destines / pre-chooses / fore-knows those who are his people?

++ Is it fair for God to save some people and not others?

→ God promises Paul that he'll save people, so what does Paul do? Why?

→ What is our role in evangelism and what is God's role?

APPLY:

→ How is God's control over his mission a comfort for you?

++ In what ways do you doubt God's control over his mission?

→ How is our involvement in God's mission a challenge for you?

→ What tempts you to do the opposite of 18:9?

++ Is 18:10 a promise to us in our evangelism or specific to Paul?

++ Paul goes from part-time tent maker to full-time missionary. Do you think that's unique to Paul as an apostle, or is it a model to us to give as much time and energy as we can to God's kingdom-building work?

PRAY TO END: Split into pairs and share about one person you know who doesn't yet trust Jesus and then pray for them.

Praise God for his control over everything and that we have a part to play in his plan. Ask God to give us confidence and boldness to be on mission in Wollongong.

ACTS 18:18-19:7 • 7-13 AUG

PRAY TO START: Thank you God for our salvation

LAUNCH: → What's the longest journey you've ever been on?

CONTEXT: → Draw on the map Paul's journey in Acts 18:18-19

READ: Acts 18:18-19:7

OBSERVATION:

→ What did Paul do on his journey?

→ What did Apollos and the Ephesian disciples have in common?

MEANING:

→ Fill in this table: What do we learn about John's baptism?

Matt 3:1-2	
Mark 1:1-5	
Luke 1:76-77	
Mark 1:8	
Matt 3:11	

→ Fill in this table: John mentions the baptism of the Holy Spirit. What does the baptism of the Holy Spirit mean?

Acts 1:4-5	
Acts 1:8	
Acts 2:17	
Acts 2:37-41	

→ Why wasn't Paul satisfied with them only knowing John's baptism? What makes John's baptism incomplete?

→ After the Ephesian disciples were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus and received the Holy Spirit, what happened to them?

→ Is this something we should expect to happen today?

APPLY:

→ Imagine you had a friend who believes in Jesus but feels disappointed he/she can't speak in tongues. They tell you they feel uneasy; lots of their other Christian friends can speak in tongues, and they wonder if those friends are better Christians. How would you respond to him/her?

→ We received the Holy Spirit when we believed in Jesus' death and resurrection. How does knowing we have the Holy Spirit encourage us as we seek to make disciples?

→ How can we teach one another the truth of the gospel, like Priscilla and Aquila did with Apollos?

PRAY TO END: Thank you all Christians have the Spirit in us, and a fuller understanding of the gospel.

ACTS 19:8-20 • 14-20 AUG

PRAY: Play (or sing) the song '[O Praise the Name](#)' by Hillsong & pray from it

LAUNCH: → Share the meaning of your name / nickname

READ: Acts 19:8-20

CONTEXT: → Paul is now in Ephesus. Where does he preach first? Why?

OBSERVATION + MEANING:

→ What were some of the miracles God did through Paul?

→ Why did God do these miracles?

→ Why were the Jews in 19:13 unsuccessful in driving out the evil spirit?

++ Read Matt 7:21-23. What extra element does this add?

→ In these verses, what is the "name of the Lord"?

1 Cor 6:11	
Acts 4:12	
Luke 10:17	
Acts 3:6	
Prov 18:10	

→ How did the Ephesian believers honour the name of the Lord?

APPLY:

→ What are some sins you've confessed and repented of in the past?

→ What's an example of persecution in this passage? Why did it happen?

→ It is clear from the passage that as God's word spreads, persecution comes with it. Persecution can come in many different forms. Have you faced persecution before, or seen other Christians persecuted?

PRAY TO END: Pray for each other to stand firm in our persecutions and to trust the power of Christ's name.

You could also check out Open Doors, an organisation which seeks to support persecuted churches around the world - www.opendoors.org.au

ACTS 19:21-41 • 21-27 AUG

PRAY TO START: Thank you God for being the true, living and only God.

CONTEXT: → Read out this information about the city of Ephesus

“Ephesus was the capital city of a Roman province in Asia. Ephesus was a significant centre of trade, located near a harbor at the mouth of the Cayster River in western Asia Minor. The city lay in a long, fertile valley. Major roads connected Ephesus to all the other significant cities in Asia Minor... Ephesus was known for its amphitheatre, the largest in the world, designed to hold up to 50,000 spectators. Ephesus was also the location of the great temple of Artemis, or Diana, built in 550 BC. This temple, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, was “425 ft. long and 220 ft. wide; each of its 127 pillars which supported the roof of its colonnade was 60 ft. high” (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia). Much Ephesian industry was related to this temple. Craftsmen sold shrines and household images of the goddess that worshipers could take with them on long journeys. The Ephesians were proud of their religious heritage and its accompanying legends.”

www.gotquestions.org/Ephesus-in-the-Bible.html

READ: Acts 19:21-41

OBSERVATION:

→ What events led up to the riot in Ephesus?

→ What was Demetrius's motivation in speaking to the craftsmen?

APPLICATION:

→ We talked lots about \$, our hearts and the future of our church in the New Home series. It's been 3 months since then. Where are you at now in your thinking about generosity? How has your life been changed since?

MEANING

→ Paul has been saying that 'gods made by human hands are no gods at all' (19:26). Why does he say this? (See also Psalm 135)

APPLICATION

→ Are there any 'gods made by human hands' we might worship today?

→ *Why* should we stop worshipping idols? *How* can we stop?

→ How does Paul treat unbelievers who follow other religions?

→ How should we treat people who follow other religions? Have a discussion about the following verses.

Col 4:5-6

1 Pet 2:12

1 Pet 3:15-16

++ Reach Australia has podcasts on reaching Hindu & Muslim Australians – worth checking out in the week: reachaustralia.com.au/reach-podcast

PRAY TO END: Pray for opportunities for conversations with our unbelieving friends, family and workmates.

GROW • 28 AUG-3 SEP

Grow is on this Wednesday 30th August, 7-9pm including dinner.

It'll be an especially exciting one as we explore our upcoming Salt Fest events and consider how we can better be on mission to our city.

This is a moment you won't want to miss and we really want every member of Salt Church to come to *Grow* – for everyone who calls Salt their home to be there or to watch the recording after if they really can't come in person.

But in case you or someone in your Small Group has never been to a *Grow*, here's what they're all about

Why Come to *Grow*?

We know that many of us have busy lives with lots of responsibilities. So getting to Church and Small Group regularly is enough of a challenge, yet alone coming out for a moment like *Grow*.

Also, many of us at Salt feel like we already know our Church's vision and we're on-board with it, so it doesn't really feel worth coming to *Grow* – there's nothing new to hear and I could definitely use a night off.

There's also a bunch of us at Salt who have never been to a *Grow*, so don't really know what it is that we're being encouraged to get along to.

Whatever camp you're in, here's where *Grow* fits and why *Grow* matters.

Bus Versus Boat

You may have heard Salt's pastors describe Salt as a rowing team not a bus. On a bus 1 person drives and everyone else comes along for the ride. If you're not driving, you don't have to contribute to the trip, you hop on and off when you want, you get somewhere because of the driver.

But on a rowing team 1 person might steer the boat, but you only move forward if everyone rows; if the team works together to make it happen.

God's Vision for Salt Church

Jesus has given all his people a massive task: "...go and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matt 28:18-20). So we want to play our part and see a flood of lifelong disciples of Jesus in Wollongong and beyond – that's what Jesus wants to see and it's what Jesus deserves.

Why Grow Exists

We don't want to do this solo though – each of us trying to make disciples or growing as Christians on our own. We also don't want to be a bus – a handful of us doing this and the rest just kicking back, along for the ride. We want to be a rowing team, for the glory of God.

But without moments like *Grow* it's very difficult for us to row together as a whole Church. At *Grow* we plan and pray about how we're going to do this *together*. What kind of Church do we want to be? Where are we heading as a Church? Where is God guiding and leading us? It's like a family meeting, or the team huddle just before we put the boat out on the water.

Each *Grow* is different too. The big vision doesn't change; it shouldn't as it's God's vision that he gives to every Church and all His people. But how we achieve that vision, the strategy, the next steps, the different roles we can each play – that's what changes. So each *Grow* we dive into the next steps to take as a Church family. Not what's coming up this week, but what we're doing in the next 3 months, this year, where we want to be in 5 years.

As well as all that, *Grow* is just like Sunday Church in that we get to meet together as God's people for fellowship, to enjoy being a community, to listen to and learn from our good Father.

How You Can Help

To make it easier to come we don't run Small Groups the week *Grow* is on. Instead, go to *Grow* that week for bible teaching and fellowship. We moved *Grow* to be mid-week too, so we still have some energy in the tank and less competing plans. So can I encourage you: come to this *Grow*, and help others from your Small Group come too. Each *Grow* is an encouraging and crucial moment for Salt. We want to grow – that's what Jesus deserves.

ACTS 21:1-14 • 4-10 SEP

PRAYER CARDS: At Grow we gave out cards to help us pray for family and friends who aren't yet Christians, particularly with the Salt Fest events coming up. As we kick off this week, we'll explain and give out these cards to anyone in our small group who missed Grow and then take a few minutes to share about and pray for the people on our cards – we can either do this sharing with the whole group or in pairs.

PRAY: Pray a big prayer for the name of Jesus to go out to all the earth.

LAUNCH:

→ What do you consider to be “worth the pain”? E.g. a workout, long hike, eyebrow waxing, study, etc

READ: Acts 21:1-16

OBSERVATION:

→ Who warns Paul of the future that awaits him in Jerusalem?

→ How do they warn him?

→ How many times do they warn him?

MEANING:

→ Read Acts 11:28, 19:21, 20:22-24, 24:17 and Rom 15:25-28

From these verses, why is Paul convinced he needs to go to Jerusalem?

→ Why do you think Paul continues his journey despite all these warnings?

→ Do you think the Holy Spirit is trying to *discourage* Paul from going to Jerusalem or *prepare* Paul for what he'll face in Jerusalem?

→ How can we work out what "the Lord's will" is for us?

++ To help us answer this question read: John 6:38-40, Ephesians 1:9-10, 1 Peter 4:17-19, 1 Thessalonians 4:1-3, 1 John 5:14-15

→ How is Acts 21:13-14 similar to Jesus words in Luke 22:42? What does that imply about the pattern of the Christian life?

APPLY:

→ It seems like Paul had a choice: stay and avoid persecution or continue and face it. How does his response challenge or encourage you?

→ What is 1 thing you *know* God wills you to do that you're having trouble trusting him or obeying him on?

PRAY TO END: Pray 'not my will but yours be done' in all of our lives.

ACTS 21:17-24:27 • 11-17 SEP

PRAYER CARDS: Start your time together by sharing about and praying for the people on our cards – either as a whole group or in pairs. You can ask:

→ Is there anything we can celebrate? Has anyone been able to take a next step in chatting / inviting?

→ Is there a conversation you hope to have this week? What will you say?

PRAY TO START: Pray we might grow in our longing for the new creation.

LAUNCH:

→ What is a controversial opinion that you have?

CONTEXT:

→ What was Paul expecting to happen to him in Jerusalem

READ: Acts 21:17-24:27 – heads up that it's a long one!

→ As you read, write down every time 'the resurrection' is mentioned.

OBSERVATION:

→ Why do the people / priests want to arrest and put Paul on trial?

→ What does Paul say is the real reason for his arrest and trial?

MEANING:

→ Why do you think the resurrection is so important to Paul?

→ Read Rom 1:1-4, 1 Cor 15:12-19, 1 Pet 1:3-5. What do these verses add?

++ Why is his message so controversial for the Sadducees and Pharisees?

APPLY:

→ Is the resurrection as important to you as it was for Paul? Why, why not?

→ What might change for you, if you were more aware each day of our coming resurrection?

→ How do Paul's responses to persecution challenge or encourage you?

++ How should we respond to suffering and persecution for Jesus' name?

++ Read Romans 5:3-5, 2 Timothy 3:12, 1 Peter 1:6-7, 1 Peter 2:19-25.

How do these passages shape our expectations of the Christian life?

PRAY TO END: Pray that we might have boldness because of our hope.

ACTS 25:1-26:32 • 18-24 SEP

PRAYER CARDS: Start your time together by sharing about and praying for the people on our cards – either as a whole group or in pairs. You can ask:

→ Is there anything we can celebrate? Has anyone been able to take a next step in chatting / inviting?

→ Is there a conversation you hope to have this week? What will you say?

PRAY TO START: Grow our love for those who don't know you, Lord.

LAUNCH:

→ What's a time you tried to share the gospel or talk about God with an unbeliever and botched it?

CONTEXT:

→ Read Acts 1:8 and 28:28-31. Where is Jesus taking his Gospel?

READ: Acts 25:1-26:32

OBSERVATION:

→ What comments are made about Paul's innocence?

→ How would you feel if you were in Paul's situation?

MEANING:

→ What's the main message Paul's trying to communicate in his speeches?

++ Look at these verses. How does Paul see his message fulfilling the OT?

Isaiah 26:19

Psalm 49:15

Psalm 16:9-11

Isaiah 53:10

Psalm 71:20

Daniel 12:2

++ Paul's appeal to Caesar causes him to remain under arrest and on trial despite his innocence. Why would God allow Paul to remain in chains?

→ What is Paul's desire even while he's on trial and under arrest?

APPLY:

→ How does Paul's desire shape our desires?

→ Suffering often makes it seem like God isn't at work in our lives or on our side. How does this passage shape our hope even in suffering?

→ 1 Peter 3:15 tells us: *"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."*

How confident are you to share the gospel with someone who asks?

→ How could you become more confident, or clearer on what to say?

PRAY TO END: Pray that we might long to see everyone we know trust in Jesus, whether that takes a short time or long!



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Paul proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus
Christ – with all boldness and without hindrance!

Acts 28:30-31