



# UNSTOPPABLE

Acts

saltchurch.

# UNSTOPPABLE: ACTS 9-17

At Salt we're praying for a flood of lifelong disciples of Jesus across Wollongong and beyond. That's not a mission we invented. It's the mission Jesus sends us on. It's the story of Acts – of God's unstoppable mission. It feels under threat, as 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 the people around us is unstoppable.

## SERIES BREAKUP

DATE	BIBLE	DATE	BIBLE
18-24 Jul	<a href="#">Acts 9:1-19a</a>	22-28 Aug	<a href="#">Choose your own</a>
25-31 Jul	<a href="#">Acts 9:19b-31</a>	29 Aug - 4 Sep	<a href="#">Acts 14:8-22</a>
1-7 Aug	<a href="#">Acts 10:44-11:18</a>	5-11 Sep	<a href="#">Acts 15:1-11, 22-33</a>
8-14 Aug	<a href="#">Acts 12:1-24</a>	12-18 Sep	<a href="#">Acts 16:16-34</a>
15-21 Aug	<a href="#">Acts 13:1-12</a>	19-25 Sep	<a href="#">Acts 17:16-34</a>

## THE "SWEDISH METHOD"

For this series we're using a bible reading approach called 'The Swedish Method', named after a Swedish Small Group where it was first used. Here's 4 reasons why the 'Swedish Method' is helpful for us...

1. God spoke to reveal, not to hide Himself, so the bible basically makes sense. It doesn't need experts to make it clear. Anyone with the Spirit can read and understand some of what God's saying. This approach helps us experience that truth for ourselves. It puts us on the same level, where we're all wrestling with what God's word says, rather than constantly deferring to the 'bible expert' or study notes in our bibles.

2. It teaches the most basic but most difficult skill of reading the bible – actually observing what it says and letting God speak for himself.
3. It's a helpful model for how to read the bible, which you and people in your group can use again anytime you read it.
4. God's word changes us. God didn't just speak through human authors in the past. He speaks to us right now by the Holy Spirit every time we read and think about His words. This approach helps us experience that truth, especially with the application and sharing icons.

## How It Works Each Week

- Read the bible passage out loud in your group.
- Give people 5-10 minutes on their own to come up with an answer for each of the 5 icons (or as many as they can).
- Take it in turns to share a light bulb moment each, then a question each, and so on, until you've finished all 5 for everyone.
- If 5 icons is too many for your group, do 3: lightbulb, question, arrow.
- Pray together in response to what you've read and thought about.

## The 5 Icons



Something that stands out to you from the passage



A question you want to ask the author of the passage or God



What you think the big point of the passage is, in a sentence



An application for your life from the passage



Something you want to share with a friend

## One Last Tip

Compared to the notes you normally get this will feel very bare bones! That's ok though, because the aim of using the Swedish Method is to get people engaging with the words of the bible and discovering for themselves that they can get gold out of it, using this simple tool.

The best preparation for you as a leader is just to go through this process of coming up with the 5 icons yourself, before your group meets. As one extra support to help you, in the notes below you'll find a 1-2 sentence explanation of what I think the main (or a key) point of each passage is.

# 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 our friends, family, colleagues. And 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 from the start of August, there'll be a bit of time each week to share stories about, and to pray for, people we know who don't know Jesus yet. You'll find all the info you need to do that 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 1 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 9:1-19 • 18-24 JUL

MAIN POINT: God has the power to save anyone, even his strongest opponent. And God's chosen way to do this is to use Christians, like how he used Ananias. Also, as Jesus promised in Matt 28, he's with his people, so persecuting Christians *is* persecuting Jesus.

Pray to Start

Read Acts 9:1-19

Use the Swedish Method Icons

Pray to End

# ACTS 9:19-31 • 25-31 JUL

MAIN POINT: God transforms Paul from a terrifying opponent of Jesus and Christians, to a man who fears God more than he fears humans and death. We too should fear God most and live for an audience of one: God alone.

Pray to Start

Read Acts 9:19-31

Use the Swedish Method Icons

Pray to End

# ACTS 10:44-11:18 • 1-7 AUG

3-2-1

**CARDS:** 321 cards help us pray for and talk with people we know who don't yet trust Jesus as their Saviour and Lord. We'll introduce the cards this week, then pray for and talk about our friends each week for the rest of the Acts series.

- ***Explain how these cards work:*** pick 3 people to pray for, 2 people you want to invite to a Salt Event (like a Sunday Gathering or Salt Fest), and 1 person you want to have a deeper Jesus-focused chat with.
- ***Give everyone 5 minutes to write 6 names on their cards.*** If they can't think of all 6, they can take it home and write more later.
- ***Split into pairs:*** share about 1 of your people each, and pray for them.
- ***Dive into Acts 11:*** follow the notes below to see the wide heart of God.

**MAIN POINT:** God's heart is to save people from all nations, as God does not show favouritism. The Holy Spirit is given to these 1<sup>st</sup> Gentile Christians when they believe in Jesus, and they're also some of the few Christians in the bible said to speak in tongues – the reason they do this is to give proof to Jewish Christians that Gentile Christians are God's people too.

Read Acts 10:44-11:18

Use the Swedish Method Icons

Pray to End

# ACTS 12:1-24 • 8-14 AUG

3-2-1

Let's check in on our friends. Has anyone been able to take a next step? Is there anything we can celebrate or pray for? Is there a conversation you hope to have this week? What do you think you'll say?

**MAIN POINT:** God listens to his people's prayers, and in response can save (like he saves Peter) but doesn't always do this (like he didn't save James). Also, God humbles the proud but raises up the humble.

Pray to Start

Read Acts 12:1-24

Use the Swedish Method Icons

Pray to End

# ACTS 13:1-12 • 15-21 AUG

3-2-1

Let's check in on our friends. Has anyone been able to take a next step? Is there anything we can celebrate or pray for? Is there a conversation you hope to have this week? What do you think you'll say?

**MAIN POINT:** God the Holy Spirit is more powerful than evil spirits and the work of Satan or his followers. Even the devil cannot stop people hearing the gospel and believing it.

Pray to Start

Read Acts 13:1-12

Use the Swedish Method Icons

Pray to End

# CHOOSE YOUR OWN • 22-28 AUG

**DIRECTION:** Take this week to choose your own adventure. Some options...

- Continue your chat from last week about the Holy Spirit's work in Acts.
- Spend more time sharing and praying for people from the 3-2-1 cards.
- Take it in turns to share your testimony of how God saved you.
- Grab a feed and have some social fun times (more on that below)
- Write your own bible discussion on a topic the group wants to explore.

## WHY 'CHOOSE YOUR OWN' WEEKS:

One downside of the way we unpack books at Salt is we move quick! You might have started a great chat in your group 1 week, but by the next we've moved on. This week is a chance to choose your own adventure – continue 1 of those chats or look at another topic / question / part of the bible your group wants to. Choose your own weeks can be great for your group digging into something that's puzzling, troubling or exciting them.

## SOCIAL FUN TIMES:

If you haven't done a social / fun thing for a while you could use this week for that. See chap 5 & 6 of [Getting Started as a Small Group Leader](#) for tips on how to use these to grow your group, so you get more out of them.

## DO YOUR OWN BIBLE DISCUSSION:

Alternatively, if you want to continue a previous discussion or dig into another topic / question / part of the bible here's how you could do that...

**Getting Ideas:** A week before, let your group know there's a 'choose your own' week coming up. Collect ideas, like a topic / question / part of the bible they want to explore. Vote to find the most popular 1 & get prepping.

**Getting Prepped:** Brainstorm where in the bible the topic / question comes up. Or for a part of the bible, read it a bunch of times to work out what it means. Ask your coach & other leaders if they have ideas.

There's also systematic theologies and commentaries upstairs at 275 in the Salt Library that you can borrow if you want to dive deeper. And if you're keen to learn more about how to write studies, check out [Writing a Small Group Study](#) by Richard Sweatman.

**Packaging a Discussion:** Here's 3 options...

1. Use the COMA method: ask the group what's the *Context* | what you *Observe* | what you think it *Means* | how you think it *Applies* to us.
2. Use the Swedish Method that we've been using in Acts
3. Just read a passage, ask 'what do you reckon?' & see where you go.

## NEED HELP?

You don't have to have all the answers or be an expert to be a Small Group Leader, so don't stress out for this week. Just get people into God's word and let Him teach and transform us by His Spirit. Your Small Group Coach is always available and ready to give you help and advice too.

# ACTS 14:8-22 • 29 AUG - 4 SEP

3-2-1

Let's check in on our friends. Has anyone been able to take a next step? Is there anything we can celebrate or pray for? Is there a conversation you hope to have this week? What do you think you'll say?

**MAIN POINT:** God has given proof that he's there, he's good, and he's the only 1 worthy of worship. The proof is the gospel, and the evidence of God's common grace as he generously gives good to all. It's also normal to suffer hardships for Jesus, just like Paul and Barnabas model to us.

Pray to Start

Read Acts 14:8-22

Use the Swedish Method Icons

Pray to End

# ACTS 15:1-11, 22-33 • 5-11 SEP

3-2-1

Let's check in on our friends. Has anyone been able to take a next step? Is there anything we can celebrate or pray for? Is there a conversation you hope to have this week? What do you think you'll say?

**MAIN POINT:** Both Jews and Gentiles are saved by grace alone through faith in Jesus, and not by keeping OT Jewish laws. Faith in Jesus shows itself in obedience though, which for 1<sup>st</sup> Century Gentiles are the things in 15:29.

Pray to Start

Read Acts 15:1-11, 22-33

Use the Swedish Method Icons

Pray to End

# ACTS 16:16-34 • 12-18 SEP

3-2-1

Let's check in on our friends. Has anyone been able to take a next step? Is there anything we can celebrate or pray for? Is there a conversation you hope to have this week? What do you think you'll say?

**MAIN POINT:** Believing in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is the powerful way all people can be saved.

Pray to Start

Read Acts 16:16-34

Use the Swedish Method Icons

Pray to End

# ACTS 17:16-34 • 19-25 SEP

3-2-1

Let's check in on our friends. Has anyone been able to take a next step? Is there anything we can celebrate or pray for? Is there a conversation you hope to have this week? What do you think you'll say?

**MAIN POINT:** God can be known, there are true and false ways to worship God, and God commands people to repent before he judges all humanity - proof God will judge is that Jesus has risen from the dead to be the judge.

Pray to Start

Read Acts 17:16-34

Use the Swedish Method Icons

Pray to End



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The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

Acts 11:21