

## Acts 5

The Book of Acts is largely about how the Holy Spirit works in the church members individually, and collectively, as if they were a living organism. It is about church-building, person by person. True believers have oneness in purpose. Acts also describes the power from God that flows through men helping each other and worshipping God. We become superhuman lovers of God and healers of men. The Book of Acts shows us the Apostles and the church becoming far better versions of themselves.

Acts 4 showed the clash between organized religion under men's control with men's rules being unable to cope with the dynamic works of God. Both systems cannot be in control over the church. It is an illusion to think that we control anything, except our choices. Faith and religion are like oil and water. They do not mix well.

This week we will see not only that God's works cannot be controlled or channeled. This week we will see that religion refuses to see the real God when the opportunity presents itself. Anytime that we are so invested in winning the argument that we are knowingly blind to the truth, we are headed for trouble. Advancing in faith requires some level of humiliation.

This week we see that God will not be mocked or blocked when it is time for him to make his moves in this world. Anyone who mischaracterizes the Holy Spirit is in far worse trouble than those who mocked Jesus. Why is that so?

*<sup>31</sup> And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. <sup>32</sup> Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. (Matthew 12:31-32)*

It is interesting that Jesus is to be our focus to make peace with God; and the Holy Spirit takes a more covert role in the whole process. Conversely, when the silent partner of the Godhead (Holy Spirit) has his turn in the spotlight that there is a zero tolerance for any mocking or blasphemy. The Holy Spirit is always unpredictable, and he is always more powerful than we expect.

We used to have a horse on the ranch that we used to herd cattle named Loco. This horse was pretty normal until it came time to hit a full gallop. Once you put him

into a full gallop he kicked in a whole added level of speed and adrenaline, and he became unstoppable. Horses are often described as **spirited** due to their energetic and lively nature. This term reflects their strong instincts, intelligence, and emotional sensitivity. He would become so excited that he lost his mind and you could not stop with the reins. He literally ran through barbed wire fences at an insane death gallop with full grown men. He was like a rocket horse that had no brakes or steering wheel. The Holy Spirit is like an unstoppable horse. He decides how fast, how far and where the whole thing is going. It is always exciting and an adventure. The good news is that God does not take us on any scary rides. He lets us pump the brakes and step to the side if we want to.



**Read Matthew 5:1-6:** It is the best place to be if you are a believer, and the Holy Spirit is doing a work of God. It is the worst place to be if you are either opposed to the things of God or insincere in your faith. You will become very uncomfortable and out of control if you are not seeking God. It is like not being comfortable in your own skin. Going to church as a rote habit and inciting memorized liturgy can be a mind-numbing and boring thing. You can take pride in that you are doing the right thing; but you may not even know God. You cannot do that when the Holy Spirit is moving. The Holy Spirit afflicts the comforted and comforts the afflicted. If you are not right with God you will definitely become uncomfortable or convicted so that you need to make changes.

I remember in High school going to church camp and meeting students from another church. They were very different and more spiritual. It thought that they were goofy and showing off. At the same time I knew that they were on the right track and I was playing with fire. I had conflicting forces telling me to stay away from them and other forces telling me that was where I needed to get to.

Anytime that the Holy Spirit makes a move, the forces of darkness show up immediately to try to control the spreading of the blessings. Satan is definitely in the counterfeit business. He does not build anything. He only copies God's works. I remember when I took my dad to a Billy Graham outreach at Fresno State in

1976. There were 41,000 people there on Sunday night, and 201,000 people who came over the four day event. I had the joy to see my dad take that long walk all by himself, along with others all the way down to the stage. It was a spiritual breakthrough. As we walked out there were some Church of Christ, Boston members carrying signs calling Billy Graham a heretic and attempting to get the new believers to attend their church since it was the only true church. How confusing!

On another occasion, I also remember putting in a full page article in the Imperial Valley News Press newspaper with my business partner in El Centro. We reprinted the Four Spiritual Laws in a full page add. The Church of Christ people called us. We thought they were going to encourage us for doing this. All they could say was that we left out baptism! They were telling us that we can't be saved without being baptized. We were dumbfounded that these supposed Christians could only focus on leaving baptism out. I have had the same things happen with Victory Outreach people saying that you are not saved if you do not speak in tongues. I also remember being approached in a shopping center by a super friendly guy. I did not know if he was gay or pushing Amway. He wanted me to join his group of believers. He wanted to meet and then he started bringing his boss over to try to get me to join their fellowship. In the end they pushed the idea that if I was not actively evangelizing or subjecting myself to their shepherding that I was not saved. All said, any time I have been in a spiritual movement there were impostors right there, front a center trying to alter my trajectory. I actually have more similar stories that I could share.

Being close to where God is moving is enlightening. Enlightenment from God is not necessarily complimentary. You become very aware of your sins and failures. It is not a feeling of hopelessness. It is a strong vibe for intellectual honesty and brutal candor about my sin. It is almost like wanting to throw up so that you can feel better. God wants us to get it off of our chest and end any imaginary pretense. That is what God wants. He already knows the truth. The Holy Spirit won't show up for a masquerade party.

*God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.” (John 4:24)*

The Holy Spirit will convict us on areas to change in our lives. It really does not matter if you are a believer or not. The Holy Spirit is going to show us how nose blind we are. You can almost feel ill over your own sin; or you can repent ...or you

can resist the Spirit and push him away. Either way, you will not be left unchanged. One reason that God does not hound sinners is that every time they lie about what is going on inside. They will harden and become more illogical and degenerate every time that they deny the truth. This is why unbelievers seem to become more galvanized against God over time. It starts out as a preference to do life their own way. Eventually, they became haters of God and encouragers of those who do the same. Even Christians can be reminders to unbelievers of that unending annoyance of anything reminding them of God.

*When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: <sup>9</sup>about sin, because people do not believe in me; <sup>10</sup>about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; <sup>11</sup>and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. (John 16:8-11)*

God has to subject people to hardships and disappointments to have any chance at reaching them.

**Read Acts 5:7-11:** There are times when it can become dangerous to be a pretender in church. The accountability is high because the evidence of the truth and power. It is one thing to lie about yourself and your intentions. It is a whole other thing to lie about anything to do with God's works or your place in it. God will not be mocked, and he hates being mischaracterized much more than normal sin. Misrepresentations of God or his works is the most dangerous thing that you can do. A lot of Christians leave a lot of garbage on God's doorstep, as they promote themselves and their power.

*<sup>27</sup> “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. <sup>28</sup>In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. <sup>29</sup> “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. <sup>30</sup> And you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ <sup>31</sup> So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. <sup>32</sup> Go ahead, then, and complete what your ancestors started! <sup>33</sup> “You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? <sup>34</sup> Therefore I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and*

*crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town.* <sup>35</sup> *And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiyah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.* <sup>36</sup> *Truly I tell you, all this will come on this generation.* <sup>37</sup> *"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.* <sup>38</sup> *Look, your house is left to you desolate.* (Matthew 23)

**Read Acts 5:12-16:** The signs and wonders were breaking out all over the place. The Apostles passing shadows were literally healing the sick. Demons were being exercised. The Apostles became like super heroes. People feared them. Today, God does healings; but it is more hidden and seemingly mundane. In those days the miracles were apparent. Today God works in the shadows and veils the supernatural in forgetfulness and the routine events of the day. You really have to focus and pray to even see God's hand in our lives each day. That is why reflection and thanksgiving is necessary to even see what God just did for us. It can happen right in front of us like it was not a miracle at all.

*It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings.* (Proverbs 25:2)

**Read Acts 5:17-25:** You have to wonder if God is stepping on the gas pedal, why the dead religion and evil men even play a part. In reality, the forces of darkness are displaying and emphasizing God's work as they attempt to resist it. Jesus used the opposition of the Pharisees to teach us by contrast. Similarly, the non-spirit led men stick out here like a sore thumb. It almost becomes ridiculous to oppose God when angels start walking men out of prison and all kinds of supernatural things happen in plain sight. That is clearly blasphemy of the Holy Spirit to know it is a work of God and mischaracterize it.

**Read Acts 5:26-39:** Now the Apostles are treated by their enemies like VIPs. Even so, unbelievers are not capitulating to the elevated conversations and status of the religious. The Sanhedrin is handling the believers like unknown quantities to be examined and kept under raps. Like Daniel and his friends, they were not trying to make trouble. They were just sharing the truth happening in real time. The Spirit of God moves in his timing and does supernatural things in men's lives. That always brings conflict. Those times are returning again.

<sup>12</sup> But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.” <sup>13</sup> Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, <sup>14</sup> and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? <sup>15</sup> Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?” <sup>16</sup> Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, “King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. <sup>18</sup> But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.” <sup>19</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual <sup>20</sup> and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. <sup>21</sup> So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. <sup>22</sup> The king’s command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, <sup>23</sup> and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. <sup>24</sup> Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, “Weren’t there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?” They replied, “Certainly, Your Majesty.” <sup>25</sup> He said, “Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.” <sup>26</sup> Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!” (Daniel 3)

**Read Acts 5:40-42:** Once we get a taste of life in the Spirit, normal life seems boring. Some missionaries feel a little displaced and lost when they return home. I can recall starting a cattle feeding business in El Centro in 1992. I started as a businessman who happened to be a Christian. Years later, after becoming involved in some ministries I was more of a Christian who just happened to be a businessman. My weekly business highlights were not the deals. They were the outreaches.

The Apostles were so proud to be part of God's team that even the lashes and whippings were getting them excited. They knew that they were being punished for the right reasons. It was like a confirmation of allegiance and being a legit team member, instead of a spectator. I think that there are stories of Martin Luther and others who actually whipped themselves.

## **Self-Discipline Practices**

### **Whipping**

- **Self-Flagellation:** Luther practiced self-flagellation, where he would whip himself as a form of penance. He believed this would help him atone for his sins and draw closer to God.

### **Walking on Knees**

- **Kneeling:** Luther also reportedly walked on his knees for extended periods as part of his rigorous spiritual discipline. This was common among some monks at the time, who thought such acts demonstrated devotion and humility.

These actions were part of Luther's struggle with guilt and his quest for salvation before he experienced his theological transformation that emphasized grace over works. Obviously, God does not want us to whip ourselves or walk on our knees.