

T3 ACTS: THE KEYS AND THE SWORD

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SESSION 1

OPENING PRAYER

God, our Father, thank you for this opportunity to get to know you more deeply. Thank you for the gift of your Sacred Scripture, God, and for its constant challenge to us to live holier, more loving lives. As we begin this study, Lord, we ask that you would send your Spirit upon us here. Come, Holy Spirit. Come, Holy Spirit. Come, Holy Spirit. Open our eyes. Open our hearts. Help us to see Christ, more clearly. Help us to love Christ more boldly. Help us to surrender our lives to you. Amen.

The teenage years are usually accompanied by a certain amount of freedom. Now, you might be saying to yourself, "For other people, sure, but not in my house." The truth, though, is that no matter how strict or lenient your parents are, you have more freedom now than you did ten years ago—and you will be even more "free" ten years from now. But what do you do with that freedom? What (and more to the point, *who*) influences your decisions and choices?

Who decides where will you go to school? To college? What you will do for a living? Who decides if you will get married? Who you will marry? What about a vocation to the priesthood or religious life? How about where you live or how much money you will make? Are these choices you make alone, or do you leave room in the equation for God?

You might be wondering what all these questions regarding your freedom and future have to do with this first session studying the book of Acts. Actually, everything! The apostles also had questions about their future and what to do next. They had been following Jesus, in the flesh, every day. He told them where to go and what to do. Now, all of the sudden, they were left alone (or so they thought), wondering what to do and where to go next.

In this first section you will see that true **freedom** is not "doing whatever you want." Rather, **freedom** is the **power to do what is right** (i.e., what God wants). It is in the battle between doing good or evil—between freedom and slavery—that heroes are born and true disciples of Christ are made.

THE CHAPTERS COVERED IN THIS LESSON

Acts, chapters 1-2

OPENING QUESTION

Do you believe that God is present and active in your life?

VERSE TO REMEMBER

Acts 2:42

BREAKING IT DOWN

1. How did Jesus give the apostles instructions after His ascension?
He gives them and us instructions through the Holy Spirit.
2. Why did Jesus spend those forty days with His disciples?
 - 1) He wants to offer bodily proof of the Resurrection.
 - 2) He wants to teach us about the kingdom of God.
 - 3) He is preparing them for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

3. **Between the gospels and Acts 1:8, how have Jesus' instructions changed?**
Now the apostles will be His witnesses to the entire world.
4. **Why was it important for the apostles to see Christ's ascension?**
In watching His ascension, they know that He will begin to reign at the right hand of the Father.
5. **What qualification did Peter place for nominating the "replacement" apostle for Judas?**
A personal witness of Jesus' ministry.
6. **What did the apostles experience at Pentecost?**
They hear the sound of a mighty rushing wind, see tongues of fire and they begin to speak in other languages.
7. **What Old Testament event is Pentecost "undoing"?**
Pentecost undoes what occurred at the Tower of Babel.
8. **Pentecost is the genesis of confirmation. What does the sacrament of confirmation bring?**
An increase and a deepening of your baptismal grace.
9. **In Peter's speech (in Acts 2) what did he tell the people to do and what did he promise?**
 - 1) He tells them to repent and be baptized
 - 2) He promised them forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit.
10. **What four ways did the Christian community reflect the Holy Spirit's presence in their lives (2:42)?**
Fellowship, catechesis, the breaking of the bread, and through prayer.

Play the DVD - Disc 1, Segment 1

TALKING IT OUT

Discussion Questions

1. How often do you ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in your decisions? Explain.
2. Does your parish reflect a spirit of Pentecost? Are people bold and enlivened by the Holy Spirit? Do you feel encouraged, challenged, or inspired to go out and change the world for Christ? Explain.
3. At a glance, the Acts of the Apostles might seem more like a history book than a Biblical book. Why is this book, specifically Acts, still so important, 2,000 years later? What does it teach us about living the Holy Spirit, living like Christ and functioning as a Church?
4. Considering the early Church community, why was prayer so important? How important is it to your personal life? Explain.

THINKING IT THROUGH

How did you answer that Opening Question, "Do you believe God is present and active in your life?" If you believe it, explain why. If you struggle with the truth, again, explain why. List some people and/or ways in which God has been trying to speak truth to you.

CLOSING PRAYER

ST. PETER'S RESUME

Here is a brief biography on the first pope, the world's greatest "fisherman turned shepherd."

ORIGINAL NAME

Simon, a common Jewish name in the New Testament period. Jesus changes his name to Peter (*Petros* in Greek), meaning "Rock."

AGE

Uncertain. Commonly believed to have been born around the time of Christ and to have died in the late AD '60s.

BIRTHPLACE

Many believe Bethsaida, on the western coast of the Sea of Galilee. St. Philip, another one of the twelve apostles, was also from there.

PARENTS' INFORMATION/ UPBRINGING

He was the son of a man named Jonah (see Matthew 16:17). Simon Peter's mother is not mentioned in Scripture. His younger brother, Andrew, however is the one who first brought him to Jesus (see John 1:40-42) and was, also, one of the twelve apostles.

EDUCATION

While Peter was raised in the Jewish faith, he probably had no formal religious training. In Acts 4:13, we are told that Peter appeared before the Sanhedrin looking like "an unlearned man."

RELEVANT JOB EXPERIENCE

Simon and Andrew were successful fishermen (see Luke 5:7). They worked with their good friends and fellow apostles, Sts. James and John.

MARITAL STATUS

St. Peter was married, though we do not know his wife's name. His mother-in-law is referred to in Scripture (see Matthew 8:14, Mark 1:30, Luke 4:38). His wife may have even accompanied Peter on some of his missionary journeys (see 1 Corinthians 9:5, 1 Peter 5:13).

TRAVELING COMPANIONS/FRIENDS

St. Peter's most famous traveling companion was probably St. Mark (see Acts 12:25, 1 Peter 5:13), to whom one of the gospels is attributed.

PATRONAGES

He is the patron saint of fishermen, the papacy, bridge builders, and the city of Rome, among other things.

DEATH

Tradition tells us that St. Peter was martyred in Rome between AD 64-67. He was crucified upside down, at his request; he believed he did not deserve to die in the same manner as Christ.

FEAST DAYS

February 22 - Feast of the Chair of Peter
June 29 - Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul
August 1 - Feast of St. Peter in Chains
November 18 - Feast of the Dedication of the Basilicas of Peter and Paul

LEADER'S NOTE

St. Peter's Resume

It is easy for biblical figures to take on a mythical, almost "storybook" status. Given that it has been thousands of years since they walked the earth, it is not surprising that many people, teens included, have a difficult time seeing them as real people.

Use this section to help the teens see St. Peter as a living, breathing man. Point out all the information we know about him and how the Bible and Church Tradition help paint a more realistic picture of him as a man, not just as a saint.

Point out to them the various feast days in which we celebrate St. Peter's life, a life led for Christ, as yet one more way that we, as the Church, are still intimately tied into the Communion of Saints.

PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY ON THE PAPACY

We are very fortunate as Catholics that Christ instituted His Church here on Earth.

Before going on, read that phrase again because to some people it makes no sense. The truth is, however, that Christ did institute a Church—a foundation through which and by which the Holy Spirit guides and leads us deeper into God's divine revelation.

One might ask, however, why Jesus would entrust His Church to sinful human beings. It is not as if Jesus, as the Son of God, didn't know that his followers would sin. The beauty of the Church, however, is that it stands as a guardian and interpreter of the Gospel of Christ, standing as a pillar of truth (see 1 Timothy 3:15)—in spite of the sinfulness of its members.

In Matthew 16:18-19, Jesus sets St. Peter above the other apostles as their leader:

And so I say to you [Simon], you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Take note of all that Jesus does here:

1. He changes Simon's name to Peter ("Rock").
2. He tells Peter that He will build His Church upon him.
3. He promises that "the gates of the netherworld" (i.e., death or hell) will not prevail against the Church.
4. He gives Peter "the keys" of the Kingdom.
5. He gives Peter the power "to bind" and "to loose."

Let's deal with each one briefly, in terms we can understand:

1. **Jesus changes Simon's name to Peter ("Rock").** If you have experienced *The Ten Commandments*, recall the others whose names were changed by God. Remember that a change in one's name signifies a change in his essence.
2. **Jesus tells Peter that He will build His Church upon him.** Seems pretty straightforward, no? While some assert that the first time Jesus uses the word "rock" He is referring to Peter and the second time He is referring to Himself, this is a flawed interpretation based on a misunderstanding of the original Greek. The majority of biblical scholars all agree that Christ is referring to Peter in both instances.
3. **Jesus promises that the "gates of the netherworld" will not prevail against the Church.** People may try to point to scandals as proof that Christ was talking about Himself as the Church, rather than an earthly, institutional Church. But this betrays the plain sense of Scripture. The truth is that while battles may be lost, the war has already been won by Christ's passion, death, and resurrection. The Church will always prevail; Christ has promised as much.
4. **Jesus gives Peter "the keys" of the Kingdom.** The person with the keys is in the driver's seat and nothing has changed in 2,000 years. Keys not only let people in, they also lock others out. The keys signify power.

Consider Jesus' words in Luke 10:16:

Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.

LEADER'S NOTE

Personal Bible Study on the Papacy

Most teens will not do a personal Bible study without much prompting and encouragement. Today, with the widespread use and ease of the Internet, it is important to affirm the validity of going back to the **actual sources** when discussing topics of such importance as the papacy and authority in the Church.

There are countless websites and resources filled with misinformation, exaggeration, lies, and half-truths, all designed to weaken the influence of the papacy and the authority of the Church. Such websites are very dangerous to Catholic young people—and all of them are only a mouse click away.

Taking the time to work through the Bible, showing some of the instances that demonstrate the primacy of Peter and institution of the papacy is invaluable. No website and no sociopolitical discussion regarding the papacy will be as powerful as having a teen read God's own words on the subject. This goes a long way toward addressing whatever concerns and questions that they might have about the institution of the papacy and will shed light on the God-given role of Peter and His successors as Vicar of Christ.

The one driving is the one who steers the car, i.e., the one who directs where it goes. The other passengers can object, but they don't have the keys and, thus, cannot drive. Notice that none of the other apostles were given the keys, only St. Peter.

5. Jesus gives Peter the power "to bind" and "to loose."
What does this mean? It refers to Peter's authority to rule in the Church. In a sacramental sense, it refers to the power to forgive sins in the sacraments of reconciliation and anointing of the sick, which all bishops and priests share by virtue of their ordination.

As Jesus goes on to make clear, the authority exercised by Peter on earth counts in heaven as well (read again the verses from Matthew 16 mentioned above before continuing).

Here are some additional verses that demonstrate the special authority given to St. Peter, the first pope. Take the time to read through each verse and answer the questions below.

Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:16-19, Luke 6:12-19, Acts 1:13
Whose name appears first in each list?

Mark 8:29, John 6:68-69, Acts 2:14-17
Who becomes the leader and "spokesman" for the apostles?

Luke 22:31-32
Who is the only apostle that Jesus personally prays for?

Luke 24:34, 1 Corinthians 15:5
Among the apostles, who did the resurrected Christ appear to first?

Mark 16:7
Who was singled out by the angels following Christ's resurrection?

John 21:15-17
Who does Christ empower (as shepherd) to feed the sheep?

Acts 1:15-16
Who oversees the election of Judas' successor?

Acts 3:1-10
Who is the first apostle to work a miracle in Christ's name following Pentecost?

Acts 10:9-19
Who receives a special revelation from God regarding the Gentiles' place in the Church?

Galatians 1:8
Who does even St. Paul submit to?

You get the idea.

May God bless our Holy Father and all of our bishops, that they might continue to lead the flock with humility, boldness, wisdom, and abandonment to God's will.

Pray Matthew 16:16-20, again, and close in prayer.

NOTES

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Notes area for recording thoughts and reflections during the study.

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LEADER'S NOTE

St. Paul's Resume

See the notes on St. Peter's Resume on page 33.

SOME INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT ST. PAUL AND HIS JOURNEYS

As mentioned, St. Paul was born in Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia, a Roman province in the southeast of Asia Minor. Cilicia was known for its wealth and extensive commercial traffic.

According to Jewish custom, Paul learned a trade before he began his rabbinical studies. He learned to make tents out of goat hair.

St. Paul was not only a rabbi, but a Pharisee, a learned doctor of the law.

Paul's father, though a pure-blooded Jew, was also a Roman citizen.

Tarsus was the site of a famous university, with a greater reputation than even those universities in Athens and Alexandria. So Paul was surrounded by great thinkers throughout his youth.

At about thirteen years of age, Paul was sent to Jerusalem to a school of sacred learning where he spent many years studying the Scriptures.

In the years following Pentecost, Paul was an active leader in the persecution of the early Christians, seeking to wipe this "new religion" off the face of the planet.

Contrary to popular belief, nowhere in Scripture does it say that Saul was riding a horse when he was knocked to the ground and Christ appeared to him.

The vision of Christ in dazzling light blinded Paul for three days, in which he neither ate nor drank.

Following his experience of Christ, many believe that Saul spent almost three years in solitude in Arabia, studying and meditating on Christ.

St. Paul's first missionary journey (AD 45-48) spanned more than twenty cities and 1,500 miles.

His second missionary journey (AD 50-53) spanned twenty-two cities and more than 2,800 miles.

His third missionary journey (AD 60-61) spanned about eighteen cities and more than 2,700 miles.

His fourth and final missionary journey to Rome included stops in about thirteen cities and covered 2,300 miles.

Paul endured his share of hardships, including imprisonments, beatings, lashings, stonings, shipwrecks, sleeplessness, and hunger (See 2 Corinthians 11:23-29).

St. Paul also had a memorable run-in with a snake (see Acts 28:1-10).

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LEADER'S NOTE

Some Interesting Facts about St. Paul and His Journeys

The better your teens know St. Paul and the more they know about him, the more sense both *Acts* and his epistles will make. St. Paul is irrepressibly human in his writings. He endured hardships. He got annoyed. He suffered greatly. The humanity of St. Paul is one of his greatest charisms to the average reader.

Encourage your teens to take the time to read through these facts about the world's greatest evangelist. Tell them to pause after each one and ask, "Did I already know this?" or "Would I do that?" The more they find themselves in St. Paul, the more they will relate to his epistles.