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# Introduction

## Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies

Welcome to the conversation! The Bible study resources you are using are created to support the bold vision of the Book of Faith initiative that calls “the whole church to become more fluent in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture, in order that we might live into our calling as a people renewed, enlivened, empowered, and sent by the Word.”

Simply put, this initiative and these resources invite you to “Open Scripture. Join the Conversation.”

We enter into this conversation based on the promise that exploring the Bible deeply with others opens us to God working in and through us. God’s Word is life changing, church changing, and world changing. Lutheran approaches to Scripture provide a fruitful foundation for connecting Bible, life, and faith.

## A Session Overview

Each session is divided into the following four key sections. The amount of time spent in each section may vary based on choices you make. The core Learner Session Guide is designed for 50 minutes. A session can be expanded to as much as 90 minutes by using the Bonus Activities that appear in the Leader Session Guide.

### • Gather (10-15 minutes)

Time to check in, make introductions, review homework assignments, share an opening prayer, and use the Focus Activity to introduce learners to the Session Focus.

### • Open Scripture (10-15 minutes)

The session Scripture text is read using a variety of methods and activities. Learners are asked to respond to a few general questions. As leader, you may want to capture initial thoughts or questions on paper for later review.

### • Join the Conversation (25-55 minutes)

Learners explore the session Scripture text through core questions and activities that cover each of the four perspectives (see diagram on p. 6). The core Learner Session Guide material may be expanded through use of the Bonus Activities provided in the Leader Session Guide. Each session ends with a brief Wrap-up and prayer.

### • Extending the Conversation (5 minutes)

Lists homework assignments, including next week’s session Scripture text. The leader may choose one or more items to assign for all. Each session also includes additional Enrichment options and may include For Further Reading suggestions.

## A Method to Guide the Conversation

Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies has three primary goals:

- To increase biblical fluency;
- To encourage and facilitate informed small group conversation based on God’s Word; and
- To renew and empower us to carry out God’s mission for the sake of the world.

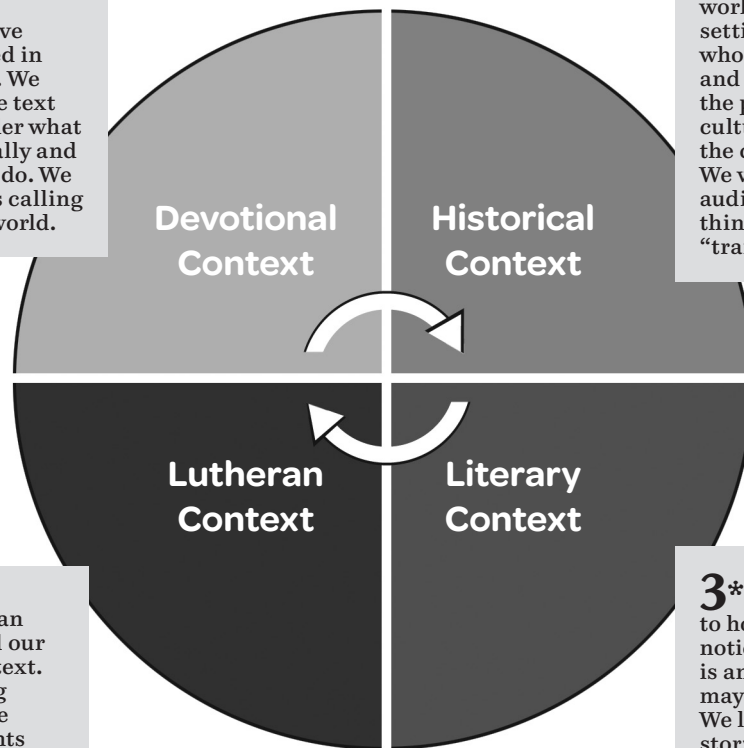
To accomplish these goals, each session will explore one or more primary Bible texts from four different angles and contexts—historical, literary, Lutheran, and devotional. These particular ways of exploring a text are not new, but used in combination they provide a full understanding of and experience with the text.

Complementing this approach is a commitment to engaging participants in active, learner-orientated Bible conversations. The resources call for prepared leaders to facilitate learner discovery, discussion, and activity. Active learning and frequent engagement with Scripture will lead to greater biblical fluency and encourage active faith.

**1** We begin by reading the Bible text and reflecting on its meaning. We ask questions and identify items that are unclear. We bring our unique background and experience to the Bible, and the Bible meets us where we are.

**5** We return to where we started, but now we have explored and experienced the Bible text from four different dimensions. We are ready to move into the “for” dimension. We have opened Scripture and joined in conversation for a purpose. We consider the meaning of the text for faithful living. We wonder what God is calling us (individually and as communities of faith) to do. We consider how God’s Word is calling us to do God’s work in the world.

**2\*** We seek to understand the world of the Bible and locate the setting of the text. We explore who may have written the text and why. We seek to understand the particular social and cultural contexts that influenced the content and the message. We wonder who the original audience may have been. We think about how these things “translate” to our world today.



**4** We consider the Lutheran principles that help ground our interpretation of the Bible text. We ask questions that bring those principles and unique Lutheran theological insights into conversation with the text. We discover how our Lutheran insights can ground and focus our understanding and shape our faithful response to the text.

**3\*** We pay close attention to how the text is written. We notice what kind of literature it is and how this type of literature may function or may be used. We look at the characters, the story line, and the themes. We compare and contrast these with our own understanding and experience of life. In this interchange, we discover meaning.

**\* Sessions may begin with either Historical Context or Literary Context.**

The diagram on page 6 summarizes the general way this method is intended to work. A more detailed introduction to the method used in Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies is available in *Opening the Book of Faith* (Augsburg Fortress, 2008).

## The Learner Session Guide

The Learner Session Guide content is built on the four sections (see p. 5). The content included in the main “Join the Conversation” section is considered to be the core material needed to explore the session Scripture text. Each session includes a Focus Image that is used as part of an activity or question somewhere within the core session. Other visuals (maps, charts, photographs, and illustrations) may be included to help enhance the learner’s experience with the text and its key concepts.

## The Leader Session Guide

For easy reference, the Leader Session Guide contains all the content included in the Learner Session Guide and more. The elements that are unique to the Leader Session Guide are the following:

- **Before You Begin**—Helpful tips to use as you prepare to lead the session.
- **Session Overview**—Contains detailed description of key themes and content covered in each of the four contexts (Historical, Literary, Lutheran, Devotional). Core questions and activities in the Learner Session Guide are intended to emerge directly from this Session Overview.
- **Key Definitions**—Key terms or concepts that appear in the Session Overview may be illustrated or defined.
- **Facilitator’s Prayer**—To help the leader center on the session theme and leadership task.
- **Bonus Activities**—Optional activities included in each of the four sections of “Join the Conversation” used by the leader to expand the core session.
- **Tips**—A variety of helpful hints, instructions, or background content to aid leadership facilitation.
- **Looking Ahead**—Reminders to the leader about preparation for the upcoming session.

## Leader and Learner

In Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies, the leader’s primary task is facilitating small group conversation and activity. These conversations are built around structured learning tasks. What is a structured learning task? It is an open question or activity that engages learners with new content and the resources they need to respond. Underlying this structured dialog approach are three primary assumptions about adult learners:

- Adult learners bring with them varied experiences and the capability to do active learning tasks;
- Adult learners learn best when they are invited to be actively involved in learning; and
- Adults are more accountable and engaged when active learning tasks are used.

Simply put, the goal is fluency in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture. How does one become fluent in a new language, proficient in building houses, or skilled at hitting a baseball? By practicing and doing in a hands-on way. Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies provides the kind of hands-on Bible exploration that will produce Bible-fluent learners equipped to do God’s work in the world.

## Books of Faith Series

Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies includes several series and courses. This Acts unit is part of the Books of Faith Series, which is designed to explore key themes and texts in the books of the Bible. Each book of the Bible reveals a unique story or message of faith. Many core themes and story lines and characters are shared by several books, but each book in its own right is a book of faith. Exploring these books of faith in depth opens us to the variety and richness of God’s written word for us.

## Acts Unit Overview

The Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts were written by the same writer. Throughout these two books, God's mission to redeem and restore creation is carried out first through Jesus and then through his followers. In Acts, the same Spirit that anoints Jesus at his baptism pours out on an international group of Jews in Jerusalem at Pentecost and continues to lead and empower Jesus' followers to boldly share the good news. This proclamation of the kingdom of God leads some Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) to believe, while others (including Jewish and Roman authorities) resist. Paul is instrumental in spreading the good news of Christ. Eventually he, like Jesus, is arrested and put on trial. At the end of Acts, he continues to preach and teach the kingdom of God while under house arrest in Rome. At this point, the Jesus movement that began with a small group of Jewish believers in Jerusalem now includes communities of Jewish and Gentile followers from Jerusalem to Rome.

Session One, "The Spirit Creates Community" (Acts 2:1-47), tells the story of Pentecost, when the Spirit is poured out on a group of Jews in Jerusalem. The gift to speak in other languages signals the fulfillment of God's promise to restore Israel and gather the nations into the covenant community of God's people.

Session Two, "The Empowering Spirit" (Acts 4:1-37), continues the story of early believers in Jerusalem. The disciples speak boldly about the resurrection of Jesus, bringing them into conflict with authorities. The community of Christ shares a pattern of life together characterized by prayer and the sharing of possessions.

Session Three, "The Spirit on the Margins" (Acts 8:1-40), shows the Jesus movement spreading into other regions of Judea and Samaria, spurred by the persecution of believers that followed the stoning of Stephen.

Session Four, "The Conversion of Peter" (Acts 10:1-48), explores the transformation of the apostle Peter and a righteous Gentile, Cornelius, and the beginning of the first church consisting of both Jews and Gentiles.

Session Five, "World Upside Down" (Acts 17:1-34), continues the account of the spread of the Jesus movement as Paul proclaims Christ in Thessalonica and Athens, Greece. Paul looks for common ground with nonbelievers, but does not hesitate to challenge idolatry.

Session Six, "A Riot in Ephesus" (Acts 19:1-41), studies Paul's visit to Ephesus, the capital of Asia Minor. Here he causes another disturbance by calling into question the practice of magic and the local goddess Artemis.

Session Seven, "On Trial for the Resurrection" (Acts 24:1-27), follows Paul to Caesarea, where he explains to Jewish and Roman authorities that he is on trial for the resurrection.

Session Eight, "And So We Came to Rome" (Acts 28:1-31), digs into the final chapter of Acts. Claiming he had done nothing against Jewish or Roman law, Paul appealed his case to Caesar. After being shipwrecked on the island of Malta, he finally arrives in Rome, where he continues to boldly witness to the power of the resurrection.

Acts 2:1-47



**Focus Statement**

The Spirit that anointed Jesus to proclaim good news to the poor and release to the captives is poured out on an international group of Jews in Jerusalem. The gift to speak in other languages signals the fulfillment of God's promise to restore Israel and gather the nations into the covenant community of God's people.



**Key Verse**

"This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear." Acts 2:32-33



**Focus Image**



*Pentecost*, All rights reserved. Vie de Jésus MAFA, 24 rue du Maréchal Joffre, F-78000 VERSAILLES, France, www.jesusmafa.com

# The Spirit Creates Community

## Session Preparation

### Before You Begin . . .

The book of Acts is about transformation. It tells the story of how a small group of Galilean Jews who followed Jesus and witnessed his resurrection became a countercultural movement that spread throughout the Roman Empire. Just as Jesus' ministry began with his being endowed with the Spirit in baptism, the community of the risen Christ emerges from the shadows when an international gathering of Jews is filled with that same Spirit on Pentecost. This is a community and a movement of witness and service created, empowered, and led by the Spirit to restore Israel and the nations of the world.

### Session Instructions

1. Read this Session Guide completely and highlight or underline any portions you wish to emphasize with the group. Note any Bonus Activities you wish to do.
2. If you plan to do any special activities, check to see what materials you'll need, if any.
3. Have extra Bibles on hand in case a member of the group forgets to bring one.

### Session Overview

The story of Pentecost is an excellent place to begin these eight sessions on Acts. The dramatic account of the outpouring of the Spirit sets the stage for the entire book of Acts, because the Holy Spirit is the dynamic power that inspires, emboldens, equips, directs, and empowers followers of the risen Jesus. This is why Acts is sometimes referred to as the Acts of the Spirit. Acts 2 paints a vivid portrait of the Spirit as a divine energy at work in and among this international gathering of Jews to create a universal community that in its life together reflects the reality of God in Christ.

### LITERARY CONTEXT

Luke, the writer of the Gospel of Luke, is believed to be the writer of Acts as well. In Acts the writer tells how the ministry and mission of Jesus continue after his resurrection and ascension. In Luke 4:18-19 Jesus applies the words of the prophet Isaiah to himself:



## SESSION ONE

### ? Spirit:

The word *spirit* in Greek is *pneuma*, and it has a variety of meanings. It is used to refer to wind or breath, and also to that which animates or gives life to the body. In the New Testament it is used with the adjective “Holy” to represent the divine breath or energy that sanctifies or works through God’s people to fulfill God’s creative and redemptive purposes.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

In this key passage in Luke, Jesus describes the purpose and distinguishing features of his ministry in Galilee. The **Spirit** is the divine power that enables him to fulfill his mission. Although Jesus will no longer be physically present after his ascension (Acts 1), followers endowed with the same Spirit-power will proclaim and embody the good news of “release to the captives.”

In discussing the Pentecost story with your group, focus on how the Spirit is experienced as dynamic power or a divine energy. Invite people to reflect on how this display of Spirit-power is different from other forms and experiences of power, and to pay attention to the particular pattern of communal life associated with the Spirit.

#### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Jewish and Greco-Roman cultural contexts are both important for understanding the impact of the Pentecost story. The witnesses to the Pentecost events are all Jews. Pentecost was the name for the Jewish celebration of the Feast of Weeks. Originally it was a harvest festival, but it came to be associated with the giving of the law to Moses on Mount Sinai. A first-century Jewish writer named Philo described the giving of the law in this way:

Then from the midst of the fire that streamed from heaven there sounded forth to their utter amazement a voice, for the flame became the articulate speech in the language familiar to the audience.

If Luke knew of this tradition, this would suggest that he conceives of the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost as analogous to the giving of the law. The language barriers that are transcended through the gift of speaking in other languages may also be understood as a reversal of the story of Babel in Genesis 11.

The Acts account of being filled with the Spirit also may have evoked connections with ecstatic religious experience in Greco-Roman culture. Again, a description by the Jewish writer Philo of spirit-possession typical in Greco-Roman religious contexts illuminates the accusation that those filled with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost were drunk:

For with the God-possessed not only is the soul wont to be stirred and goaded as it were into ecstasy but the body also is flushed and fiery . . . and thus many of the foolish are deceived and suppose that the sober are drunk.

Luke's account of being infused with the Holy Spirit is a model for cross-cultural mission, because it describes the experience in a way that would have been familiar to Gentiles. In contrast to the fiery frenzy of Greco-Roman forms of inspiration by the spirits, however, those filled with the Holy Spirit proclaim the powerful acts of God in intelligible speech, link **repentance** and conversion to the "ways of life" (2:28), and praise God.

#### LUTHERAN CONTEXT

Martin Luther emphasizes the activity of the Spirit more than we sometimes realize. He believes that the Holy Spirit works through the Word to create faith. It is the Spirit that enables believers to embrace and embody the good news of Jesus Christ. Moreover, it is in and through the power of the Spirit that those baptized into Christ participate in the ongoing redeeming and sustaining activity of the Creator in the world. Luther summarizes these beliefs in his explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy, and kept me in the true faith" (*Luther's Small Catechism with Evangelical Lutheran Worship Texts*, Augsburg Fortress, 2008, p.16; also ELW p. 1162).

To prepare for this part of the discussion, you might want to look up references to the Holy Spirit in the *Book of Concord* or *Luther's Works*. Consider discussing why the Spirit generally doesn't receive as much attention as God the Creator and Jesus Christ. A conversation about how people experience the Spirit might also be instructive. What are some adjectives and metaphors that best depict participants' experience of the Holy Spirit? How does discussing the activity of the Spirit in our lives or in the world make us feel, and why?

#### DEVOTIONAL CONTEXT

As people reflect on their own understanding and experiences of the Spirit in the light of the Pentecost story, it is important to appreciate a diversity of perspectives. In order for participants to share their convictions and experiences of the power of the Spirit in their own lives, a safe environment needs to be established, with patient listening the norm. You may want to have the person

#### ? Repentance:

The verb *repent* in Greek literally means "afterthought." Repentance involves an intentional reorientation that leads to change in behavior or conversion to a new way of life. In Acts the call to repentance is in effect a call to contemplate what needs to change in order for the Spirit to renew and sustain life.



## SESSION ONE



### Tip:

What is the first thing—a word, image, or symbol—that comes to mind for participants when they hear *Holy Spirit*? Invite them to share responses to this question as they introduce themselves to one another.



### Tip:

Pray or sing the hymn “Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord” (ELW 395, stanzas 1 and 3).



### Tip:

The Gospel of Luke and Acts both emphasize that the saving and redeeming activity of God is visibly manifest. This Focus Activity invites us to see the presence of God’s Spirit not only in the faces in the image, but also in the faces and lives of one another.

doing the talking hold a special object. When that person is done sharing, they give the object to a person who will speak next. Remind participants that everyone’s perspective is valid, and therefore it is important to refrain from making judgments.

It may be difficult for your group to discuss the work of the Spirit, because this is frequently viewed as a personal or private matter. The story of Pentecost in Acts, however, portrays the public and communal aspects of the Spirit’s activity. Affirm ways the Spirit moves within individuals, in communities, and in the world. How might we cooperate more with what the Spirit is doing in all of these areas?

### Facilitator’s Prayer

*Spirit of life, fill our emptiness with your fullness.*

*Spirit of power, stir our hearts afresh.*

*Spirit of love, touch us, and through us, our neighbor.*

*Spirit of creativity, enable and empower the gifts you have given.*

*Spirit of eternity, draw us ever deeper into your kingdom. Amen.*



## Gather (10–15 minutes)

### Check-in

Take time to greet each person, and invite learners to introduce themselves to one another. This first session on Acts provides an opportunity to extend hospitality to newcomers, to welcome all as Christ among us.

### Pray

*Almighty and ever-living God, you fulfilled the promise of Easter by sending the gift of your Holy Spirit. Look upon your people gathered in prayer, open to receive the Spirit’s flame. May it come to rest in our hearts and heal the divisions of word and tongue, that with one voice and one song we may praise your name in joy and thanksgiving; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

(Prayer of the Day for Vigil of Pentecost, ELW p. 36)

### Focus Activity

The Focus Image is a depiction of the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. The people in this picture respond to the Spirit’s activity in their midst in a variety of ways. Briefly describe these responses. Which person’s face or response best describes your own experience of the Spirit?

## Open Scripture (10–15 minutes)

Light a candle and give participants a moment of silence to reflect on the flame as both fire and light. Encourage them to listen to the text and pay attention to the image of fire and what the light of the Holy Spirit illuminates.

OR

Encourage group members to listen for the imagery in the text as it is read. Provide paper and pens and give participants the opportunity to sketch out the images they visualized while listening to the passage. Take a few moments for group members to share these “word pictures” with one another.

Read Acts 2:1-47.

- As you listen to the passage, what words or phrases speak to you?
- How is the activity of the Spirit described in this text?
- What questions does this raise for you?

## Join the Conversation (25–55 minutes)

### Literary Context

1. The Acts of the Apostles is the second volume of a two-volume work that includes the Gospel of Luke. Acts tells the story of how the ministry of Jesus continues and is extended through the community of followers after his resurrection and ascension. The major themes in Luke are developed in Acts through the stories of faithful followers of Jesus who have been empowered by the Spirit to bear witness to his resurrection, which sets in motion the restoration of Israel and the nations.

- Acts opens with a scene of the risen Jesus reminding his disciples that “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:5). Read Acts 1:6-8. What is the role and purpose of the Spirit that is poured out on Jesus’ followers on Pentecost?
- 2. The theme of Israel’s restoration frames Luke’s story of Jesus, and the hope that the risen Jesus would now “restore the kingdom to Israel” is repeated in the disciples’ question in Acts 1:6.
  - Reread Acts 2:1-47 and identify some signs of restoration in the relationships between the Jews and God and among one another.



### Tip:

Several parallel passages in the Gospel of Luke and Acts connect the two works, including the Pentecost story of baptism in the Holy Spirit and the story of Jesus’ receiving the Spirit at baptism in Luke 3:1-22. Two other important themes in these passages are repentance and the restoration of Israel. Judeans flocked to the Jordan River to be baptized by John in the hope that God would restore Israel by delivering the people from the hands of their enemies (see Luke 1:67-75).



### Bonus Activity:

Use a concordance or a Bible-search tool to find all the references to the verb *repent* and the noun *repentance* in Acts (and in the Gospel of Luke, if time is available). When taken together, what does the use of these terms in Acts (and Luke) indicate about the nature and practice of repentance?

## SESSION ONE



### Tip:

Bible-search tools are an excellent way to explore the text more deeply. Two online sources of search tools are [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) and [www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org).



### Tip:

In today's world we receive on-the-spot, instantaneous coverage of major new events, but the ancient world had no such communication channels or technology available. Peter's Pentecost sermon was not recorded for posterity, but the author of Acts crafted the sermon to interpret the significance of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Help your group focus on this message rather than on historical details.



### Bonus Activity:

Read the account of Jesus' trial and execution in Luke 22:66–23:49. Identify all the characters in the narrative. Who is responsible for the death of Jesus, and what are the charges that led to this?

3. Bearing witness to the risen Jesus is another important theme and activity in Acts. Peter says, “This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are *witnesses*” (2:32). Those who are filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost speak in other languages about “God’s deeds of power” (2:11).

- What does it mean to bear witness to Jesus’ resurrection today? Brainstorm a list of practical ways you might bear witness to the risen Jesus in your congregation and in your life.

4. Repentance is another major theme in the Gospel of Luke and in Acts. The call to repentance is a call to consider what changes we need to make to live in accordance with God’s life-giving purposes.

- Read Luke 3:7-14 and Acts 2:37-42. Compare and contrast John’s baptism of repentance in Luke with Peter’s call for repentance in Acts.
- What would repentance look like for us? How would it affect our habits of thought and action?
- What specific attitudes and practices might we adopt if we were to take seriously Peter’s admonition to “save yourselves from this corrupt generation” (Acts 2:40)?

### Historical Context

1. Acts has much in common with ancient historical writings. These ancient writings were not simply reports of what had happened. Acts not only tells about Jesus’ ministry, death, and resurrection; it also shows that these events happened according to God’s purposes. So in speaking of the historical event of Jesus’ crucifixion, Peter says: “This man, handed over to you *according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God*, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law” (Acts 2:23).

- From a strictly historical perspective, all those listening to Peter’s Pentecost sermon could not have been responsible for Jesus’ execution. What is the significance of implicating everyone in the audience? What does that mean for us?

2. Acts 2:41-47 is one of the earliest descriptions of the pattern of life followed by believers in Jerusalem. Followers of the risen Jesus who were baptized “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” and “had all things in common.” The word “fellowship” in Greek is *koinonia*. It was used frequently in Greco-Roman society to depict a profound sharing among friends who had all things in common.



- Reflect on ways your congregation reflects the pattern of life together in Christ described in Acts 2:41-47. Also think about some new ways your congregation might embody this countercultural pattern of life.

### Lutheran Context

1. A guiding principle of Lutheran biblical interpretation is *Scripture interprets Scripture*. This conviction is evident throughout Acts, which uses passages from the Jewish Scriptures (our Old Testament) to illuminate what is happening in the narrative. When people are filled with the Spirit and speak in other languages, Peter explains this in his Pentecost sermon by interpreting a passage from the prophet Joel.

- Read Acts 2:14-18 and Joel 2:28-29. What is the role of the Spirit in our attempts to interpret Scripture? How would you envision a fulfillment of such an outpouring of the Spirit in a Lutheran congregation today?
- Not just some but all people can be filled with the Spirit and endowed with gifts for witness and service. In line with this, Martin Luther emphasized that the vocation or calling of all the baptized is to serve and witness to Christ. How would we approach ministry and mission differently if we acted on the conviction that the Spirit works through people who hold different religious and political views and come from very different social and ethnic backgrounds?

### Tip:

The word *Pentecost* means fifty and was used to designate the Jewish Feast of Weeks, because it occurred on the fiftieth day after Passover. In the Christian liturgical calendar, the festival of Pentecost is celebrated after the fifty days of Easter.

### + Bonus Activity:

Distribute copies of ELW and have participants look at the liturgy for Holy Baptism (pp. 227–231) and find all the references to the Holy Spirit. How does the service describe the role and significance of the Spirit in baptism?

## SESSION ONE



### Tip:

Throughout Acts and the New Testament as a whole, the Holy Spirit is the source of unity and diversity, or better, unity in diversity. Encourage participants to notice and appreciate the diversity of perspectives, experiences, and gifts within your group and congregation, as well as the specific ways the Spirit binds you together in a common life.



### Bonus Activity:

Pray together for the Spirit to help you discern some concrete ways you can bear witness to the resurrection and serve others in your neighborhood. Make a list of ideas and plan to act on at least one in the next week.

2. Another important principle for Lutherans in interpreting the Bible is the relationship between *law* and *gospel*. Pentecost was originally a harvest festival, but it came to be associated with the giving of the law to Moses and the people. The Torah, or law, served as the basis for Jewish identity and moral order and therefore provided a sense of security and stability. However, the Spirit is depicted as divine energy that creates, inspires, restores, and empowers. It is unpredictable and uncontrollable and typically disrupts the status quo.

- Recall a time when you experienced the unsettling activity of the Spirit in your life. How did you respond?

### Devotional Context

1. All who have been baptized into Christ have received the Spirit, but that is often regarded as a very personal and even private reality. The Pentecost story depicts the Spirit acting in very public ways.

- What does the session Scripture text have to say about the work of the Spirit in the world, the nation, the community, and your congregation?
- Reflect on what this text may be saying to you about new possibilities for living in the Spirit.

2. Historically, believers have used a variety of spiritual or faith practices, such as praying, worshiping, reading and studying the Bible, witnessing, serving, and giving in their efforts to live according to the Spirit. In Acts 2:1-47 being filled with the Spirit and a communal pattern of life are inextricably connected.

- What are some faith practices that would nurture your congregation's life together in the Spirit and empower you for witness and service?

### Wrap-up

1. If there are any questions to explore further, write them on chart paper or a whiteboard. Ask for volunteers to do further research to share with the group at the next session.

2. Strongly encourage the participants to begin the daily readings, as outlined in the Enrichment section of their learner guides.

**Pray**

*Perplexing, Pentecostal God,  
you infuse us with your Spirit,  
urging us to vision and dream.  
May the gift of your presence  
find voice in our lives,  
that our babbling may be transformed into discernment  
and the flickering of many tongues  
light an unquenchable fire of compassion and justice. Amen.  
(Revised Common Lectionary Prayers, Augsburg Fortress, 2002)*

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**Extending the Conversation (5 minutes)**
**Homework**

1. Read the next session's Bible text: Acts 4:1-37.
2. Have a conversation with a member of your group or another person you know. Talk about how you see the Spirit at work in that person's life.
3. The call to repentance is not so much about regret or remorse as it is an invitation to reorient our habits of thought and action so that we can live in harmony with the Spirit. To repent is to contemplate what needs to change for us to live in the power of the Spirit. Make a list of some specific attitudes, perceptions, or behaviors you would like to change to bear witness to the risen Jesus in your life.

**Enrichment**

1. If you wish to read through the entire book of Acts during this unit, read the following sections this week:

Day 1: Acts 1:1-14

Day 2: Acts 1:15-26

Day 3: Acts 2:1-36

Day 4: Acts 2:37-47

Day 5: Acts 3:1-26

Day 6: Acts 4:1-22

Day 7: Acts 4:23-37

2. Throughout the Gospel of Luke and Acts, the Spirit works through Jesus and his followers to overcome boundaries and barriers for the sake of restoring people to community. In the Pentecost story the Spirit even overcomes the communication

**Tip:**

Invite participants to begin each day during the upcoming week with this prayer.

**Tip:**

Encourage participants to reflect during the week on how the Spirit is working in their lives. You may want to encourage them to keep a journal over the next eight weeks to record thoughts and questions about the readings from Acts as well as observations of the Spirit's activity.



## SESSION ONE

barrier of different languages. As you go about your week, pay close attention to the barriers that obstruct communication and community. Note instances where you see the Spirit at work in transcending obstacles to reconnect people to God and to one another.

3. The story of Pentecost is a story of people being filled and empowered by the Spirit to bear witness to the risen Jesus. As you go through the week, make note of the various ways power is expressed, especially in interpersonal relations. How is living in the power of the Spirit different from other kinds of personal, social, or political power? Be prepared to share some of your observations with the group at the next session.

4. Watch this dramatic and visual performance of the Pentecost story in Acts 2: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOm1DMZJITs>. How does this performance of the text impact the way you read and understand it?

### For Further Reading

Introduction to Acts and notes on Acts 2:1-47 in *Lutheran Study Bible* (Augsburg Fortress, 2009), *The HarperCollins Study Bible* (HarperOne, 2006), or *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

*The Acts of the Apostles*, by Luke Timothy Johnson. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992, pp. 41-63.

*To Every Nation under Heaven: The Acts of the Apostles*, by Howard Clark Kee. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997, pp. 43-55.

### Looking Ahead

1. Read the next session's Bible text: Acts 4:1-37.
2. Read through the Leader Guide for the next session and mark portions you wish to highlight for the group.
3. Make a checklist of any materials you'll need to do the Bonus Activities.
4. Pray for members of your group during the week.