

Commissioned
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Acts 1:4-11

When we think about work, some things are labor, and some things are a “labor of love.” What do you think makes something a “labor of love?”ⁱ

It’s interesting that what is labor for one person can be a labor of love for someone else because we all have different talents, gifts, abilities, and passions. Some examples: For some cooking is a chore, for others it is a delight. Some dread yard work and others love it. Exercise is a burden for some and a blessing for others. Some people hated to study and true students couldn’t wait to crack the books. (Illustration: Susan, me, yard work and my “man card.”)

You can tell if something is labor or a “labor of love” by the verb someone uses: “I should...” “I have to...” or “I get to...” “I LOVE to...” Sometimes something starts out as labor and over time becomes a labor of love as we change those verbs in our “self-talk.”

What does this have to do with Acts chapter one? I’m glad you asked! ☺ After Jesus rose from the dead, He spent forty days preparing His followers (especially His disciples) for His return to Heaven. When Jesus left earth in a very dramatic way, He “commissioned” His followers then (and now) for service in His Kingdom. Think of it this way: We don’t earn our salvation (Eph. 2:8-9) but our salvation comes with work to do. Jesus gives every follower a role to play and His Holy Spirit to empower us to do that.

The point: God doesn’t need our help, but we get to play a part as witnesses of His mercy and grace. How we labor will differ based on how He has gifted us through His Spirit. If we do what He has called us to do and do it with the empowering of His Spirit, it won’t be labor, but a “labor of love.”

For the next six months we will be studying this fascinating book of Acts. The correct title is “The Acts of the Apostles.” This is a narrative history of what the Apostles did at the dawn of the early church. It begins with Jesus’ ascension to Heaven and the arrival of His Holy Spirit and ends with the Apostle Paul taking the gospel message to Rome. This very orderly account of those events was likely written by a physician and associate of Paul named Luke who also wrote the third gospel named for him.

Acts is not so much a book of doctrine or instruction as it is a volume of history. Some people hated studying history in school, but history is important. Remember the famous quote from George Santayana, “*Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.*”ⁱⁱ You might not see the need for learning about World History or U.S. History but here’s a question: Why would it be helpful to learn about the history of your family?ⁱⁱⁱ

For a follower of Christ, the book of Acts is a part of our family history that helps us understand how the early church was formed and the gospel message was spread.

Let's look at the text beginning in verse four. Jesus is speaking to His disciples:

Acts 1:4–11 (ESV) — **4** And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; **5** for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” **6** So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?” **7** He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. **8** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

- Verse three tells us Jesus spent forty days showing Himself alive again and “speaking about the Kingdom of God.”^{iv} He was preparing them for His exit.
- His followers, no doubt excited by His resurrection, had many questions about what was coming next. How would this Kingdom He promised come about?
- Jesus slowed them down. *“Wait for My Holy Spirit whom I promised send.”*
- Verse six: *“So, Jesus, now you’re going to overthrow the Romans, right?”*
- Verse seven: *“God’s plan and His timing are none of your business.”* His followers: *“Then what IS our job in this new Kingdom? What role will we play?”*
- That brings us to Acts 1:8. This is likely the key verse in the whole book.
- Some have said it is Luke’s version of the Great Commission.
- Verse 8: *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*
- In that verse Jesus gave them (and all His future followers) their job description, their job location, and a preview of the resources He would give to do the job.
- He said we are to be His “witnesses.” Who is qualified to be a witness about anything? Does it require special training? What DOES it take to be a witness?
- Verse 15 says this commission was given to 120 followers, not just the apostles.
- Jesus’ commission was not only for “professional” ministers but for all followers.
- May I alleviate your fears about being a witness for Christ?
- Warren Wiersbe writes, *“...while some of God’s people have a calling to evangelism (Eph. 4:11), all of God’s people are expected to be witnesses and tell the lost about the Saviour. Not every Christian can bring a sinner to the place of faith and decision (though most of us could do better), but every Christian can bear faithful witness to the Saviour.”^v*
- The job: Be a witness of their experience with Jesus.
- The location: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Rome.)
- That’s a little bit like: “From Woodstock to the world.” For example:
- Jerusalem = Family, friends, co-workers, neighbors in your hometown.
- Judea = Beyond your circle -- those with different cultures and backgrounds.
- Samaria = Nearby, but larger cultural differences. (Racial tensions - John 4:9)
- Ends of the earth = In that day, Rome. In our day, the world. Global missions.

- That verse is also an outline of how the gospel was spread in those early days.
- They had a job description: Tell people about your experience with Jesus.
- They had a territory that expanded in concentric circles.
- What about resources to do the job? Jesus said, “*You will receive power...*” the Holy Spirit. He also said to “wait” for the Spirit.
- What is the difference between “waiting” and “procrastinating?”
- In Acts two we will see the dramatic arrival of the Holy Spirit.
- For now, let’s simply state we can’t truly fulfill our commission from Jesus unless we have supernatural power that comes from Him through His Spirit living in us.
- Being a witness is a simple concept; the Holy Spirit empowers us to do it well.
- Think about a testifying as a witness in court, what determines if that witness is believed? How would that apply to us being a witness for Christ?
- Our credibility as His witness comes from living in obedience to Jesus, pleasing Him, growing to be more like Him, and carrying out our assignment from Him. That is **ONLY POSSIBLE** with power from the Holy Spirit. The good news is we can do more for Jesus and be more like Him than we ever imagined **BECAUSE** of His Spirit.
- Jesus had told them in John 14-16 how the Spirit would do this:
 - The Spirit only dwells in the hearts of Christ-followers.
 - He will be our forever helper in all situations in life.
 - He will improve our personality and conduct (Gal. 5:22-23).
 - He will help us be obedient by convicting us of sin.
 - He will give us unique “gifts” and talents to serve Jesus (1 Cor. 12).
 - He will interpret scripture to remind us of the truth of all Jesus said.
 - He will prepare the hearts of those to whom we witness (John 16:8). It’s important to remember, we do the sharing and the Spirit does the saving!
- Doing our Kingdom assignment with the Spirit’s power will turn serving Jesus from labor to a labor of love. The Holy Spirit will change our verbs from “should,” and “have to,” to “get to” and “love to.”
- Some have suggested this book might not only be titled, “The Acts of the Apostles” but also “The Acts of the Holy Spirit.” As we study Acts, we will see the Holy Spirit’s intervention and work in the birth of the church over and over again.
- You can see why Jesus told his excited followers to wait for the Holy Spirit.
- That commission from Jesus represented His final words on earth. Immediately, His astonished followers saw Him leave for Heaven in a dramatic fashion.

9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. **10** And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, **11** and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

- One way to benefit from reading history is to imagine yourself right there!
- When we do that, we can understand why they stood gazing into the sky.
- No doubt they felt disappointment to see Jesus ascend to Heaven.

- Those two angels made it clear to them Jesus would come again:
 - **John 14:2–3 (ESV)** —**2** ...I go to prepare a place for you...**3** ...I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.
 - **1 Thessalonians 4:16–18 (ESV)** —**16** For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. **17** Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. **18** Therefore encourage one another with these words.
 - **Matthew 24:42 (ESV)** — **42** Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.
- What great motivation to do our Kingdom assignment well as a labor of love!
- Other thoughts? How does this passage make you feel about your assignment from Jesus?

So, What's the Takeaway?

- God doesn't need our help, but He allows us to play a part in His Kingdom.
- How we do our Kingdom job will differ based on how He has gifted us through His Spirit. The primary task of every Christ-follower is to be a witness to others of His mercy and grace. How simple is being a witness? Here's an illustration:
- *"A Chinese farmer, after having cataracts removed from his eyes, made his way from the Christian compound to the far interior of China. Only a few days elapsed, however, before the missionary doctor looked out his bamboo window and noticed the formerly blind man holding the front end of a long rope. In a single file and holding to the rope behind him came several blind Chinese whom the farmer had told about his operation. They all knew the farmer had been blind, but now he could see. He told them of the doctor who had cured him; naturally, all these other blind people wanted to meet the doctor who cured the blind man. The cured man could not explain the physiology of the eye or the technique of the operation. He could tell others he had been blind, the doctor had operated on him, and now he could see. That was all the others needed to hear. They came to the doctor."* (Holman New Testament Commentary)
- Being a witness for Christ has also been described as "...[O]ne beggar telling another beggar where to get bread."^{vi}
- We may feel intimidated about our Kingdom assignment. We might see it as something we "should do" or "have to do" but it's really something we "get to do."
- If we do what He has called us to do with the empowering of His Spirit, it won't be labor, but a "labor of love."
- Thinking about being a witness for Christ as a labor of love I couldn't help but remember the words of an old hymn:

*I love to tell the story
of unseen things above,
of Jesus and his glory,
of Jesus and his love.
I love to tell the story
because I know it's true;*

*it satisfies my longings
as nothing else can do.*

Refrain:

*I love to tell the story;
'twill be my theme in glory
to tell the old, old story
of Jesus and his love.^{vii}*

- This week, let's ask the Holy Spirit to help us be excited and not intimidated about our Kingdom assignment. Let's pray that it won't be a "should do" or "have to" but a labor of love we get to do. Let's ask Him to empower us to do that job.

ⁱ work done for the sake of one's own enjoyment or of benefit to others rather than for material rewards: He coached amateur baseball teams as a labor of love. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/labor-of-love>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/George-Santayana>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.perplexity.ai/search/Why-is-it-xRohU1JJTpmnUM0pgFALWw#0>

^{iv} *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Ac 1:3). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

^v Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 403). Victor Books.

^{vi} <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/7512829-christians-have-nothing-to-be-smug-about-we-are-not>

^{vii} https://hymnary.org/text/i_love_to_tell_the_story_of_unseen_thing