

Follow the Bible Project

Acts

A couple of years ago, I was introduced to a group of people with powerful vision and faith in God. Every time we meet we pray for, ask for and expect miracles and God is always faithful. We walk the streets at night looking for the vulnerable, disorientated, lonely, dehydrated and desperate. We've never had to look far. When God enters our lives, faith combined with His power makes things happen.



The Book of Acts is one of my favourite books of the Bible, second only to the Psalms. The excitement is tangible, amazing things happen and no one is surprised. Why? The determined followers of Jesus Christ, the living God, just will not give up. Totally committed to following an amazing God, they gathered together in unity and God showed up just like he promised. He appeared in such an intense way that the whole of Jerusalem was buzzing with His tangible presence. Utterly amazed by what they were seeing, some mocked these crazy people and accused them of drunkenness. Peter steps forward, completely filled to overflowing with the presence of God, fresh from his prayer meeting. Peter's public message of love, repentance and forgiveness spoke to the hearts of thousands of people whose lives were transformed instantly.

Unschooling, ordinary, courageous blokes just stunned the rulers and elders of the people with words from the mouth of God. To the bystander there was no doubt that they had been with Jesus himself. The opposition was so strong that they faced daily risks to their lives, but they carried on undeterred. The knowledge and wisdom of God does this to ordinary people. The words ringing in their ears must have been "We must obey God rather than men!". There have been many nights out on the streets when we too have felt this same presence of God, urging us to go where we may not otherwise have set foot, challenging us to speak to those who desperately need the touch of Jesus.

The followers in Jerusalem were growing by the moment, necessitating more organisation amongst the believers. One of the selected team was Stephen, an unstoppable man. God's Spirit completely filled him, counteracting all arguments against his wisdom. When charges were made against Stephen, he gave the longest sermon in this book, ultimately leading to his stoning. Saul, one of the fiercest opponents of the followers of Jesus experienced a one-to-one with Jesus, only to be transformed into the turncoat Paul.

There were more accounts of angels, visions, jailbreaks and miraculous escapes - there really was nothing that God did not do for his followers. Peter's vision toppled his views on purity and cleanliness as an observant Jew. He no longer had authority to call anything impure that God had declared clean, freeing him to associate with Gentiles. In God's eyes, all people were equal, free to accept Jesus and follow Him. Wherever Peter spoke about Jesus, ordinary people praised God and their lives were changed, radically. The same Holy Spirit who fell upon the Jewish believers fell upon the Gentiles too. Not even sorcerers or the sacrificing followers of Zeus could withstand the outpouring of God's transforming love to all men and women.

Despite all of these miraculous manifestations, the leaders and elders were not at all impressed. Transformed lives meant nothing to them, as they fought to uphold the purity

and integrity of their precious establishment. Their determination was so consuming that they even swore an oath to starve until Paul was dead. Paul's Roman citizenship offered him enough protection to come before Felix, Festus and King Agrippa, spreading the testimony of Jesus even further. His appeal directly to Caesar enabled him to travel to Rome via a sojourn in Malta, where locals were convinced of his genuineness after they witnessed him survive a viper's deadly bite. Every stop he made meant that more lives were exposed to the power of the living God as Paul revealed His glory.

Each encounter in our lives is an opportunity to testify to the power of the living God. Even though Paul was held in chains he spoke out boldly at every opportunity. He was known, loved and respected by followers of Jesus, regardless of their heritage or gender. What a wonderful testimony and example he is to our lives. Be encouraged that this same Jesus is alive and well and wanting to radically transform our lives today.

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