

FEATS – Acts: The Mission of God

Homework to be completed prior to the second learning session.

1. The Holy Spirit features prominently throughout the book of Acts.
 - (A) Skim through Acts and make note of at least 20 references to the Spirit.
 - (B) In a couple words briefly summarize each reference.
 - (C) Write down your response to the following questions:
 - First, how do these multiple references to the Spirit highlight the fact that God is ultimately the one on mission?
 - And second, according to Acts how does the Spirit direct and empower God's people to participate in God's mission?

2. Any task requires some degree of focus. If we're distracted we probably won't accomplish much. This is true not only when it comes to hitting a baseball or reading a book, it's also true about the Christian life in general. The discipline of simplicity is intended to help us lead focused lives. This is especially important if we want to be attentive and responsive to the Spirit as he leads us to participate in God's mission.
 - (A) Read ch. 6, "The Discipline of Simplicity," in Richard Foster's book, *Celebration of Discipline*.
 - (B) Prayerfully make a list of anything you believe may be hindering or encumbering you from "seeking first the Kingdom of God." Identify some specific steps you can take this month to integrate the discipline of simplicity into your life.
 - (C) In your journal keep track of your experience.

3.
 - (A) Continue your study and practice of prayer by reading ch. 11, "Unceasing Prayer," in Foster's book, *Prayer*.
 - (B) This month try to make unceasing prayer and ongoing practice.
 - (C) In your journal record your attempts to enter into this practice and what you experienced as a result.

4. Throughout Acts the Holy Spirit is actively guiding and directing the early Christians. However, it is apparent from the narrative that this guidance didn't always consist of self-evident revelation. Instead, it took some degree of discernment.
 - (A) Using pp. 32-36 in *The New Joy of Discovery Bible Study* (DBS) as your model, apply the method outlined in these pages, analyze Acts 15:1-29. Specifically record the relevant details related to the Six Guide Words on p. 32.

One of the fundamental convictions of the early Friends movement was that Jesus had come to lead his people himself. But, these men and women also understood that discernment was needed in order to recognize and respond properly to the Lord's prompting. As a result, they developed the practice of occasionally convening, what they called, a "clearness committee."

- (B) In order to better understand this practice read pp. 15-16, “Leadership, Decision Making, and the Church,” in EFCSW’s *Faith and Practice*¹; ch. 4, “The Guidance of the Spirit,” in Everett Cattell’s book, *The Spirit of Holiness*; and “The Clearness Committee” by Parker Palmer.²
 - (C) Find someone seeking guidance and willing to participate in such a meeting.
 - (D) With the help of that person assemble a small group to serve as a clearness committee. Explain to them the process involved.
 - (E) Following the steps and principles outlined in the articles, facilitate a meeting for clearness.
 - (F) Afterwards, respond to the following questions:
 - First, what did you learn as a result of your experience?
 - Second, what did you appreciate, or not?
 - Third, how can you incorporate this practice into your ongoing life and ministry?
5. As you’ve been studying, God is ultimately the one on mission. The work of missions ultimately belongs to God’s Spirit. It’s not the product of our efforts, resources, or ingenuity. While this might seem obvious, it’s sometimes easy to forget. In the early 20th century, a man named Roland Allen reminded Western missionaries of this important truth.
- (A) Read “The Legacy of Roland Allen” by Charles H. Long and Anne Rowthorn; and “Roland Allen: Pioneer in a Spirit-Centered Theology of Mission” by John E. Branner.
 - (B) Summarize Allen’s insights in your own words.
 - (C) How might Allen’s insights apply to your own ministry context? Write down at least eight points of application.

Effective ministry requires not only a solid understanding of Scripture; it also requires a perceptive awareness of our own cultural/historical context. This is important for a variety of reasons. For one, without such an awareness it is difficult to communicate the gospel in an intelligible way. However, another reason is equally important. We are all—in countless ways—products of our environment. Our context shapes our assumptions, values, and habits—usually without us even realizing it.

6. The following articles consider the way in which our thinking about the Church (ecclesiology) and mission (missiology) has been significantly shaped by our cultural/historical context.
- (A) Read “Missional Theology for a Missionary Church” by Darrell Guder; “New Wineskins for New Wine: Toward a Post-Christendom Ecclesiology” by Wilbert Shenk; and “Vision for Mission” by David Bosch.
 - (B) For each article write down five ideas that have practical relevance for ministry today.

¹ *Faith and Practice* should be available through your local church. A copy is also on-line at www.friendschurhsw.org.

² While Palmer clearly describes this practice, he is a liberal Quaker. As a result, he refers to the universal presence of “inner truth;” as opposed to the Spirit of Christ. This means that his article needs to be read with *discernment*! But it doesn’t mean that it can’t be helpful.

- C) These three articles compare and contrast a Christendom mentality with a missional mentality. Make a list of at least ten ways in which a missional understanding of the Church contrasts with a Christendom understanding.
- (D) Using this comparative list, evaluate which mentality best describes your existing ministry/church.