

**1. Share what impresses you about how God works out His plan of salvation for different groups of people in the book of Acts.** (This item is intended to lead into item #2, so don't let it take more than 8-10 minutes)

Leader's Note:

One of the things we would like to lead members to realize is that God works out His plan step by step. The command in Acts 1:8 indicates that the witness to the gospel message spreads first from Jews to Jews, then Jews to Samaritans (half-Jews) and then Jews to Gentiles. It would be difficult for the Jews to witness to Gentiles right at the beginning; that would be too great a hurdle to cross. But as the early church believers first witnessed what God did among the Samaritans (whom they traditionally despised) and then they saw what happened at the Cornelius episode (Gentile, but monotheistic), they were then prepared and ready to move out to missions among the pagan Gentiles.

Application thought: When we avail ourselves to be obedient and desire to be witnesses for Christ, we can trust that He will also lead us step by step so that we can increase in our understanding, faith and confidence. From Acts, we can see a pattern of how God would empower the early believers first, and then as they take a step of faith in witnessing to different peoples, God would give them boldness, and confirm with conversions to encourage their hearts.

**2. ACTS shows that the 1<sup>st</sup>C church faced various kinds of antagonisms that hindered or threatened the spread of the gospel and the growth of the church.** E.g. the orthodox Jews were jealous of the many conversions towards Christ and began to persecute the early believers, causing many to leave Jerusalem. Prejudice towards Gentiles was also a threat to the sharing of the gospel outside of Jewish communities (as observed from the Cornelius episode cf Ac 11).

**What are some antagonisms or hindrances in today's settings that threaten our witness for Christ?** (Alternative: What obstacles do you face (if any) in sharing the gospel to people around you? Leaders can choose to discuss this alternative question if you think your members know each other well and are open to sharing on a personal basis).

Leader's Note:

Let members come up with suggestions. You may wish to pause and reflect a bit before proceeding to read on.

Some antagonisms/hindrances today may include the following:

1. Prejudice remain a modern hindrance -- may be racial, or status (target group may not accept gospel message because of prejudice towards Christian agent, or Christian may be prejudiced towards a particular group).
2. Fear – different kinds; can be fear of speaking about something that is considered taboo; fear of looking “bad”; fear of rejection; lack of courage or boldness.
3. Apathy (don't see the importance or urgency)
4. Lack of proper training (easily solved)
5. Pride
6. Distractions / Personal interests override the priority of witnessing
7. Poor life testimony

The above list, of course, is not exhaustive, and there is no need to cover all the above points. Likely, you and your members may come up with other more relevant factors. The intention

of this discussion is to direct some thought into identifying if and why it is difficult for us to witness for Christ, and to consider how we can overcome our obstacles. Most Christians tend not to be witnesses because it is not something that is intentional or prioritized, or there may exist one or more of the above factors, such as fear.

From the book of Acts, we can observe from the Early Church's example that the filling and empowerment of the HS typically result in bold witness and sharing of the gospel. It did not mean that there were no obstacles. In fact, as the early church grew, persecutions also increased. But one thing is clear: without the filling and empowerment of the HS, no obstacle can be easily overcome, and neither can we expect to see God's wonderful work through us in touching the lives of others. To be filled and empowered by the Spirit however also requires surrendered lives. Lead your members to realize that even in witnessing, we have to learn to trust God to lead and teach us step by step as we avail ourselves to Him, whether in our approach to non-believers or to overcome our hindrances.