

connect **360**

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

# *Going Viral*

*The Birth and Advance  
of the Church*

A Study of the Book of Acts

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BaptistWayPress®

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*Going Viral: The Birth and Advance of the Church (Acts)—  
Connect 360 Bible Study Guide*

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# How to Make the Best Use of This Issue

Whether you're the teacher or a student—

1. Start early in the week before your class meets.
2. Overview the study. Review the table of contents and read the study introduction. Try to see how each lesson relates to the overall study.
3. Use your Bible to read and consider prayerfully the Scripture passages for the lesson. (You'll see that each writer has chosen a favorite translation for the lessons in this issue. You're free to use the Bible translation you prefer and compare it with the translation chosen for that unit, of course.)
4. After reading all the Scripture passages in your Bible, then read the writer's comments. The comments are intended to be an aid to your study of the Bible.
5. Read the small articles—"sidebars"—in each lesson. They are intended to provide additional, enrichment information and inspiration and to encourage thought and application.
6. Try to answer for yourself the questions included in each lesson. They're intended to encourage further thought and application, and they can also be used in the class session itself.

If you're the teacher—

Do all of the things just mentioned, of course. As you begin the study with your class, be sure to find a way to help your class know the date on which each lesson will be studied. Here are some suggestions to guide your lesson preparation:

- A. In the first session of the study, briefly overview the study by identifying for your class the date on which each lesson will be studied. Lead your class to write the date in the table of contents on page 9 and on the first page of each lesson.
- Make and post a chart that indicates the date on which each lesson will be studied.
  - If all of your class has e-mail, send them an e-mail with the dates the lessons will be studied.
  - Provide a bookmark with the lesson dates. You may want to include information about your church and then use the bookmark as an outreach tool, too. A model for a bookmark can be downloaded from [www.baptistwaypress.org](http://www.baptistwaypress.org) under the “Teacher Helps” menu.
  - Develop a sticker with the lesson dates, and place it on the table of contents or on the back cover.
- B. Get a copy of the *Teaching Guide*, a companion piece to this *Study Guide*. The *Teaching Guide* contains additional Bible comments plus two teaching plans. The teaching plans in the *Teaching Guide* are intended to provide practical, easy-to-use teaching suggestions that will work in your class.
- C. After you’ve studied the Bible passage, the lesson comments, and other material, use the teaching suggestions in the *Teaching Guide* to help you develop your plan for leading your class in studying each lesson.
- D. Teaching resource items for use as handouts are available free at [www.baptistwaypress.org](http://www.baptistwaypress.org) under the “Teacher Helps” tab.
- E. Additional Bible study comments on the lessons are available online. Call 1-866-249-1799 or e-mail [baptistway@texasbaptists.org](mailto:baptistway@texasbaptists.org) to order the *Premium Commentary*. It is available only in electronic format (PDF) from our website, [www.baptistwaypress.org](http://www.baptistwaypress.org). The price of these comments for the entire study is \$5 per person. A church or class that participates in our advance order program for free shipping can receive the *Premium Commentary* free. Call 1-866-249-1799 or see [www.baptistwaypress.org](http://www.baptistwaypress.org) to purchase or for information on participating in our free shipping program for the next study.

- F. Additional teaching plans are also available in electronic format (PDF) by calling 1-866-249-1799. The price of these additional teaching plans for the entire study is \$5 per person. A church or class that participates in our advance order program for free shipping can receive the *Premium Teaching Plans* free. Call 1-866-249-1799 or see [www.baptistwaypress.org](http://www.baptistwaypress.org) for information on participating in our free shipping program for the next study.
- G. Enjoy leading your class in discovering the meaning of the Scripture passages and in applying these passages to their lives.

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# Introducing

## GOING VIRAL: The Birth and Advance of the Church

### A Study of the Book of Acts

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When we hear the term “going viral” we’re likely to think of a YouTube video that’s been viewed millions of times, or some other video, website, or idea that has spread rapidly. Often when something “goes viral” it greatly impacts people’s lives as it gains national or international notoriety.

This is exactly the story we see in the Book of Acts. Shortly after the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, the Holy Spirit arrived and ignited a gospel revolution at Pentecost. The gospel began to impact people’s lives in incredible ways as once fearful disciples became bold witnesses, and an archenemy of the church became its greatest missionary. Even persecution of the early church helped to spread the good news of Jesus from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The church was on the advance!

The church is still God’s plan for advancing the gospel. Have you identified and embraced the Acts 1:8 mission for your church and your life? The Book of Acts challenges us to “go viral” with the gospel in our world. This book instructs and encourages us to take the gospel across various cultural contexts with missionary intent and commitment. We can accomplish this mission through the power of the Holy Spirit by serving others through the church and by boldly proclaiming a gospel witness.

This study consists of thirteen lessons that trace the birth and advance of the church from the arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to Paul’s imprisonment in Rome. Along the way, we will encounter stories of great courage

and commitment as persecution is met with Spirit-empowered missionary zeal, and the good news is carried to the world. The message of the Book of Acts will instruct and encourage us as we seek to take the gospel to our world.

Each Fall our Connect 360 Bible Study series focuses on a New Testament offering. For a complete list our studies see [www.baptistwaypress.org](http://www.baptistwaypress.org).

## **Background on the Book of Acts**

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The Book of Acts is the incredible story of the birth and advance of the church as it chronicles the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the spread of the gospel across the Mediterranean world. Acts 1:8 serves as an effective outline of the book as chapter after chapter we see the gospel, beginning in Jerusalem, advance to Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. The book is full of miraculous stories, suspenseful trials, and dangerous journeys, as well as acts of bravery, sacrifice, and love.

The writer of the Book of Acts was Luke, the Gentile Christian doctor who also wrote the Gospel of Luke. He was a friend and traveling companion of the Apostle Paul. Luke was a writer who paid attention to details as he constructed a careful account of the early church and the spread of the gospel.

Both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts are addressed to someone named “Theophilus.” The name means “lover of God” or “friend of God,” and there has been some discussion among Bible scholars as to whether the name refers to anyone who loves God, or is addressed to a specific individual. Some scholars surmise that the title “most excellent” (Luke 1:3) indicates that Theophilus was possibly someone of elevated rank in Roman society.

Many scholars also believe that Acts was written between A.D. 63–65. This book recorded the early days of the Christian church, the cooperative nature of the church body, and demonstrated that the gospel was available to everyone regardless of culture, race, or social standing. In addition, the Book of Acts was written to emphasize the following elements:

1. **Historic:** Luke provided an accurate account of the birth and spread of the church which highlighted the truth of the gospel. He verified historical people, places, and events.

2. **Kerygmatic:** *Kerygma* means “that which is preached”—i.e., the message. Acts presents the core of the gospel message proclaimed by the apostles.
3. **Apologetic:** Repeatedly in the Book of Acts we see a rational defense of the gospel being made to Jews and Gentiles alike. Luke wanted to emphasize that Christianity was a spiritual work of God and not a political movement designed to threaten Rome.
4. **Conciliatory:** There were major differences between Jews and Gentiles in the early days of Christianity. Peter and Paul led the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) to an important decision for the future of the church.<sup>1</sup>

There are also several themes that emerge from a study of the Book of Acts. They include:

- The priority of evangelism—through miracles and apologetics
- The power of the Holy Spirit
- Life in Christian community—passionate about its mission
- Teaching—important for evangelism as well as discipleship
- Prayer—mentioned in fourteen of the first fifteen chapters
- Breaking human barriers through Christ—across all cultural differences
- The place of suffering—in opposition to the gospel
- The sovereignty of God—accomplishing his purposes in the midst of suffering
- The Jewish reaction to the gospel
- The legal status of Christianity<sup>2</sup>

## **The Book of Acts in Our Day**

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Points of application from the Book of Acts seem to leap from the pages of Scripture into our current world. Here are a few of the transferable principles:

1. **Holy Spirit Power** . . . is required for us to effectively live for Jesus and it is also required for our churches to accomplish the Great

Commission. The Comforter and Guide that Jesus promised his followers is available to us. We must surrender ourselves to the Spirit’s leadership.

- 2. **Witnessing** . . . is to be an ongoing activity of Christ-followers. We have the privilege and responsibility to share the gospel through preaching, teaching, testimony, and by defending and explaining its truths. We are to share the good news with boldness and love.
- 3. **Opposition** . . . to the gospel should be expected. Claiming that Jesus is the only way to God will seem judgmental and politically incorrect to many in our society. We should expect opposition and persecution, but we should also be reminded (as in the Book of Acts), that God can use opposition and persecution to advance the gospel. We can depend on the Holy Spirit to provide the words we need to share in such circumstances.<sup>3</sup>

We live in exciting and challenging times. Technology and travel improvements have paved a way for us to take the gospel to our Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the world with great speed. Let this study serve as an encouragement to you as you consider how God used his followers in the past to advance the gospel. Take note of the transferable principles from the Book of Acts and apply them in your life and your local church. Commit to working in unity in your church and cooperate with fellow believers to take the gospel to a world that so desperately needs it.

GOING VIRAL: THE BIRTH AND ADVANCE OF THE CHURCH  
A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

Lesson 1	Phase 1: Mission Instructions	Acts 1:1–14
Lesson 2	The Arrival of the Promised Holy Spirit	Acts 2:1–16, 22–24, 36–41
Lesson 3	A Cure and a Call to Repentance	Acts 3:1–20
Lesson 4	A Courageous Witness	Acts 4:5–31
Lesson 5	Phase 2: Persecuted and Scattered	Acts 6:8–10; 7:54–58; 8:1b–5, 26–38
Lesson 6	Radically Saved	Acts 9:1–22, 26–31
Lesson 7	Grace Granted/Church Planted	Acts 11:1–26

Lesson 8	Phase 3: Paul's First Missionary Journey	Acts 13:1–6a, 13–15, 42–52
Lesson 9	Liberty or Legalism?	Acts 15:1–29
Lesson 10	Praise-filled Prisoners	Acts 16:11–34
Lesson 11	Crossing Cultural Contexts with the Gospel	Acts 17:10–12, 16–34
Lesson 12	A Heartfelt Farewell	Acts 20:17–38
Lesson 13	The Gospel is Unchained	Acts 23:11; 25:12; 28:16–31

### **Additional Resources for Studying *Going Viral: The Birth and Advance of the Church*<sup>4</sup>**

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- Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger III. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary—Abridged Edition: New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1994.
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## Notes

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1. Bruce Barton, Philip Comfort, Grant Osborne, Linda K. Taylor, and Dave Veerman, *Life Application New Testament Commentary* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2001), 468–69.
2. Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary (Acts)*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1998), 30–31.
3. Barton, Comfort, Osborne, Taylor, and Veerman, 470–71.
4. Listing a book does not imply full agreement by the writers or BAPTISTWAY PRESS® with all of its comments.



# lesson 1

## Phase 1: Mission Instructions

### **MAIN IDEA**

Jesus outlined the mission of his Holy Spirit-empowered witnesses.

### **QUESTION TO EXPLORE**

How does God want me to fulfill my Acts 1:8 mission?

### **STUDY AIM**

To personalize and embrace God's Acts 1:8 mission for my life

### **QUICK READ**

Jesus invites each Christian to participate with him in what God is doing in the world. Jesus shows us what to do, and gives us the power to do it.



## Introduction

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How do you react when someone says you are supposed to witness for Christ? Does the comment motivate you to tell everyone about Jesus, or does it strike fear in your heart? I must confess, I used to land in the fearful group—until I redefined what it means to witness to someone about Jesus. What does witnessing for Jesus mean to you?

In reality, being a witness for Jesus is simply telling others what you have personally experienced in your relationship with God. It might be sharing how you came to understand you needed Jesus, how you met him, or what a difference he makes in your life. Perhaps it is explaining how Jesus helps you be a better spouse or parent. Being a witness might include sharing relevant Bible verses with others, demonstrating kindness or sensitivity, or offering a listening ear. It might be asking if you may pray for someone.

Witnessing is sharing what we know about God from personal experience, as well as what we have been taught about his nature and purpose. It is being filled with God's Spirit and impacting the lives of others on his behalf. Witnessing is a process, so we do not need to fear that single events will make or break our effectiveness. The goal of witnessing is to move an individual at least one step closer to Jesus as a result of a personal encounter—whether it is the first step on their faith journey, a further step, or the decisive step when someone surrenders to Christ. In our interactions, we should present the reality of Jesus in a way that moves others one step closer to him.<sup>1</sup>

### Acts 1:1–14

<sup>1</sup> The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, <sup>2</sup> until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. <sup>3</sup> To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup> Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He

said, "you heard of from Me; <sup>5</sup> for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

<sup>6</sup> So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup> He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; <sup>8</sup> but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

<sup>9</sup> And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup> And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. <sup>11</sup> They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

<sup>12</sup> Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. <sup>13</sup> When they had entered the city, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. <sup>14</sup> These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

## Watching Jesus (1:1–3)

Luke, a doctor who traveled with Paul on some of his missionary assignments, wrote the Book of Acts and the Gospel of Luke. In his Gospel, Luke focused on things eyewitnesses saw Jesus do or heard him teach, as well as how those things changed the lives of people who placed their faith in Jesus. The Book of Acts records eyewitness accounts of what Jesus did in and through the lives of his early followers during the days following his

resurrection, his return to heaven, and the empowering of his followers with the Holy Spirit.

As we begin our study of the Book of Acts, take particular note of the words and word order of the phrase "... all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1). This phrase is important because it gives clues to Luke's approach and stylistic writing pattern, and it also presents Jesus' approach to ministry and witnessing. The same formula and concept appear in Luke 24:19, where the disciples called Jesus "a prophet mighty in deed and word."

In today's culture, we usually teach or explain something first, and then we demonstrate. However, Jesus did things first (often miraculous things), and afterward taught spiritual truths based upon what he had done. So, the teachings of Jesus began with the person and character of Jesus as revealed through his attitudes and actions. Then, his actions provided springboards

## Witnessing Truths

- As the Holy Spirit resides within us, we receive the power and ability to do the things God initiates and commands.
- As we yield to his Spirit, Jesus works through us.
- Jesus is still doing things that others notice as unusual.
- Jesus uses such opportunities to teach spiritual truth.
- We are to be witnesses to what God has done, or is doing, in our daily lives.
- The witnessing process includes Jesus doing something, teaching something, and inviting a response. Jesus commands us to be a part of what he is doing and teaching.
- Luke communicated the reports of firsthand experiences with Jesus; we need to do this too.
- We need to identify where God is at work in life situations, to highlight how God is at work, and to explain to others what his activity means.
- Witnessing is helping a person come one step closer to knowing God in a personal relationship.

for teaching what the actions meant. Jesus gave us a witnessing method to follow. We should begin our outreach efforts by doing helpful and sensitive things for others. When asked about our actions, we can say we like to share with others the goodness of Jesus we have personally experienced.

Another thing to note in Acts 1:1 is the word “began.” In his Gospel, Luke wrote about what Jesus began to do and teach until he ascended into heaven (Luke 24:50–51). In Acts, Luke recounted the things Jesus continued to do through his faithful disciples, the church. The same Jesus who began his life-changing work while he was on Earth continued his life-changing activities by the power of the Holy Spirit, working in and through believers’ lives. Just before ascending into heaven, Jesus transferred his ongoing daily work to his disciples.

Notice that Luke did not record just one action of Jesus, nor just one teaching. Luke told about many things Jesus did and taught. The Book of Acts records the variety of things Jesus began to do and teach through the apostles and first-century churches. The Jesus of Luke’s Gospel is the same Jesus who continued to do things and teach in Acts, and who is still alive today, actively doing and teaching others through his followers.

### **Waiting for the Spirit’s Power (1:4–7)**

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After Luke had made a conceptual bridge between his two books, he reiterated a summary of what Jesus did and taught between his resurrection and ascension into heaven (Acts 1:2–11). Over that time, Jesus presented himself alive after his suffering and death through many convincing proofs (1:3). He taught the disciples many things about the kingdom of God (1:4).

Jesus then gathered the disciples together and told them to remain in Jerusalem until they received what the Father had promised to give them. He reminded them while John the Baptist had baptized (immersed) people in water, the Son of God would soon baptize (immerse in, or submerge) believers in the Holy Spirit.

The disciples wanted to know when Jesus would restore the kingdom to Israel. Jesus gave them a two-part answer. First, they were not meant to know the timetables or ages the Father has fixed on his calendar; therefore, they were not to get sidetracked by trying to figure it out (1:7). Secondly,

## ***A Daily Pre-witness Checklist***

- Spend time reading or listening to God's word to start the day, even if it's only one verse.
- Ask God to bring into your life those who need a witness and to alert you to witnessing opportunities.
- When God presents an opportunity, ask him to tell you what to do and say.
- Discern one thing you can do to help the individual move one step closer to Jesus.
- Kindly do what God tells you to do or say.
- Thank God for the witnessing opportunity and pray for the person to be touched by God.

they were to wait for the Spirit and prepare to be his witnesses: “but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (1:8).

## **Witnessing by the Spirit's Power (1:8–14)**

The words in Acts 1:8 were Jesus' final personal instructions to his followers. Last words are important. Jesus' last words to his disciples instructed them to get ready to tell the world about him: his life, love, actions, teachings, power to defeat death, resurrection, ascension, and his living presence within believers via the Holy Spirit. The disciples were to prepare themselves to receive the Holy Spirit. (God would give the Holy Spirit to believers on the day of Pentecost, which will be the topic of the next lesson). Once empowered, every believer is commanded to tell others what they know about Jesus.

Some have pointed out that Acts 1:8 presents a basic geographical outline of the spread of the gospel as recorded in Acts. A general outline based upon this verse follows:

- The witness in Jerusalem (1:1–8:1)
- The witness beyond Jerusalem in Judea and Samaria (8:1–9:31)
- The witness to the Gentile regions—including Rome and the remotest parts of the world (9:32–28:31)

Acts 1:8 also gives us a practical witnessing model, as we begin by sharing the gospel with those with whom we have much in common, then with those who may be less similar to us, and also witnessing to those who are distinctly unlike us. What is the point of this model? Our witness for Jesus must expand.

Have you ever thrown a pebble into a still pond? A stone creates a circular wave that goes out from the point of contact in every direction. As the waves go out, they each encompass a larger and larger area. This reaction is a spiritual metaphor for what happens when we share the truth about Jesus with someone. The initial impact begins to send out enlarging circles or waves. As we get to know a new acquaintance and build a relationship, we meet more people within that individual's sphere of influence. As we witness to one person, ripples from that contact begin touching the lives of others as well. This expansion is why we need to freely witness as God opens doors of opportunity.

The circles of influence by which we impact more and more people to move toward Jesus become larger and larger as we influence those close to us, those less similar to us, and finally those considerably different from us. The differences might be socio-economic, ethnic, cultural, geographical, or linguistic. The greater the differences, the greater our challenge to intentionally go beyond our comfort zones and to work diligently on becoming good communicators of spiritual truth to people with lives vastly different from our own. Jesus wants us to witness to people similar to us, to those dissimilar from us, and to those vastly different from us. How will others come to know Jesus if we do not reveal his reality and love to them? How will they know of his love and redemption if we do not approach them?

It is important to notice that waiting did not mean sitting idle. God is always active, and we need to be active too. While the apostles were waiting in the first chapter of Acts, they were praying (1:14). While waiting, they also carried out some organizational work in replacing Judas with another apostle. The replacement needed to be someone who had been with Jesus

from the time of John's baptism, someone who had been involved in the three plus years of Jesus' ministry and was an eyewitness to his resurrection. After more prayer, and going through a selection process, the disciples selected Matthias.

To be witnesses of Jesus, we must continually be watching Jesus to see what he is doing, and talking with him throughout the day to remain alert to the people and opportunities he is bringing into our lives. God has entrusted the future of the church to us, and he has given us all the power we need to be effective witnesses for him. Jesus will give us witnessing opportunities each day as we keep our eyes and ears open to him.

## Implications and Actions

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God has made the Holy Spirit available to us so that we have the necessary power to do anything Jesus asks us to do. Jesus said we are to be his witnesses, and he wants each of us to carry his message to those who may know *of him*, while not really *knowing* him. As we surrender our lives and time to God, he will use us to impact others with the reality that Jesus is alive and active today. In this way, the good news can go viral in our neighborhoods, towns, country, and the world.

God calls each of us to give witness to the life-changing power of Jesus—in our homes, neighborhoods, towns, counties, country, and indeed to the ends of the earth. If we cannot personally go to other nations, we can support missionaries who do. We can also share Christ with people from other countries or cultures who live and work within our circles of influence. God has come to live inside us, to give us the power to proclaim his reality to others. As you go, share Christ through your deeds and words.



## Questions

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1. Before today's lesson, were you fearful of a discussion regarding being a witness? After studying this lesson, how do you now feel about being a witness for Jesus?
2. Does the concept of "doing first" and then saying things that bring a person one step closer to Jesus make the idea of being a witness for Jesus a little easier to implement?
3. Write down the geographic parameters of your personal Jerusalem (your neighborhood or people similar to you), your Samaria (those with a few similarities, but with some large differences), and the people (or areas of town) who represent the outer limits of your knowledge or influence.

4. When thinking of your coworkers, who needs God's love, affirmation, encouragement, or life-changing intervention? Who among your relatives needs these things?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. In what areas of your life is your witness the strongest? In what areas is your witness the weakest?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. Pray and ask God to bring to mind a person who needs your witness to help them move one step closer to Jesus. What does God suggest you do to impact them? What can you teach or say should they comment on what you did?

## Notes

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1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references in lessons 1–4 are from the New American Standard Bible (1995 edition).