

Hearts Afire and the Four Areas of Focus

A Study of the Acts of the Apostles

A Six-Session Study for the Churches of the
Illinois Great Rivers Conference of
The United Methodist Church

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To the Leader

This study is intended for use as a six-week Bible study. It could be used by existing Sunday school classes, small groups, or Bible study groups, or by new groups formed specifically for this short-term study. While the study was designed for use by adults, it could be adapted for use with youth.

The study consists of two components: daily participant readings, and weekly group lessons. Each study participant will need a copy of the daily readings at least one week prior to the beginning of the study. As the leader of this study, you may decide to provide participants with a copy of the group session material, as well, or you may choose to lead the session from a single copy of that material. Local churches and other ministries in the Illinois Great Rivers Conference are welcome to make as many copies of both the daily and weekly lessons as may be needed to conduct the study.

Each daily reading includes a passage of scripture or an excerpt from one of John Wesley's writings, along with one or more questions for reflection, a prayer or prayer suggestion, and a space for recording notes. The full text of each reading is included in the daily reading material. Scripture passages are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. References are also provided, so participants may also choose to read the scripture passages in their favorite translation.

The daily readings, which are suitable for use during participants' devotional time, are designed to "prime the pump" for the weekly group sessions. They should be read in the week leading up to the weekly session of the same number. Readings are provided for six days each week, with the expectation that the group session will occur on the seventh day. While the weekly group sessions will still make sense if participants have not read the daily readings, the group sessions will be greatly enriched by the advance preparation the daily readings provide.

The weekly group sessions are designed to last approximately 90 minutes, though they may be adapted for a shorter or longer session. Each session is based around a thought-provoking question and includes some common components:

- A brief introduction, which may be read out loud during the session
- Opening and closing worship, including song and prayer suggestions
- One or more scripture studies, including discussion questions
- "A Word from Wesley," which includes a passage from one of John Wesley's writings and related discussion questions
- "A Charge to Keep I Have" – an opportunity for participants to commit to some course of action as a result of what is learned in the session
- "Going Deeper" – additional activities and/or resources to explore if you have additional time in your session (or for participants to explore on their own)

As the study leader, you will want to preview the weekly group sessions in advance. Some require advance preparation, particularly if you want to incorporate material from the “Going Deeper” section. You may also wish to arrange for someone to accompany group singing. You may choose to encourage study participants to bring their own Bibles to the sessions, or you may want to be sure that Bibles are available in the room for participants to use.

Your role as leader is primarily to keep the session moving, to ask the questions, and to provide a safe space for participants to express their answers, even when there is disagreement within the group. During the session, try to involve as many participants as possible. Invite them to read the scripture passages aloud, and watch to be sure that everyone has the opportunity to share during the discussion times (and that no one monopolizes the conversation). However, be aware that some participants may be uncomfortable reading or praying aloud, or may prefer to think for a while before responding to a question. Therefore, never require participants to share aloud if they seem reluctant to do so.

It is the hope of the writing team that this study will open you and those you lead to a deeper experience of the working of the Holy Spirit in your midst. We will be praying for you, for your church, and for your experience with this study. May you be open to the stirrings of the Spirit, and may you be empowered to move forward in mission and ministry as the Spirit leads.