

Acts Bible Study

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I. ACTS MINI-RETREAT PREPARATION

First, please begin a vigorous focus on prayer for this weekend...encourage individuals, leaders, groups, committees, everyone to be actively in prayer about the vision/purpose that God will help emerge in our time together....also, in public worship each week up until the event. And, you are encouraged to invite as many people to be present for this as possible...not just those who participated in the Acts Study...it is always amazing how the Spirit works with those who haven't done the Acts study when they are surrounded by those who have...

Second, we'll begin at 7 p.m. on Friday (if that's alright with you folks) and end by about 9:15 p.m. (or before). Then, begin again on Saturday at a time that is agreeable for all of you (such as 8:30 a.m. if possible)...but you tell me how early people want to start...(the earlier we start the sooner we're done in the afternoon) and we'll end about 2 or 2:30 in the afternoon...depending....

Third, I will need powerpoint projector, newsprint (chart paper), markers (crayons, pencils, pens, etc. for people to use), post-it notes (about 10 per person) in the 3x5 or 4x6 variety (people need to be able to see what is written on the notes from a short distance)...

Fourth, encourage people to bring their bibles...very important....

Fifth, please make arrangements for snacks for breaks (water, drinks, snack food for people, fruit etc.)...

Sixth, you might consider having breakfast foods available for people on Saturday morning...coffee, tea, milk, juice, sweet rolls, fruit etc.

Seventh, the lunch on Saturday would be best served if there are several people who are not able to participate in the rest of the work we're doing who would be willing to come and set things up and prepare it. I would prefer that the people who are working in this event not be distracted by the food preparations...the people handling food could also oversee the snack breaks as well...

Eighth, be sure there are hymn books or other singing materials present that the people in the ministry enjoy using.

Finally, there are four devotionals that need to be done during the event...that information about those are included below.

I ask that you, as the pastor of the mission, do the opening devotions on Friday evening. I will do the closing devotions on Friday night. We need a lay person to do the Saturday morning devotions as we start and a lay person to do the Saturday following lunch devotions....please start praying about and thinking about the two lay people who could do these devotions...they are to be about 15 minutes long including the reading of the scripture text (I'll provide), a few reflective words on the text, a song, and prayers.

Remember, only about 15 minutes including the reading, prayer, a song, and some reflection on the text by the leader.

The opening worship at the start on Friday night should be led by you as the pastor of the mission.

That piece is focused on Matthew 22.34-40 and Matthew 28.16-20....Great Commandment and Great Commission.

The end of the night devotion that I usually use is: Acts 5.1-16.

Opening on Saturday morning as we begin and Saturday after lunch are to be done by lay people.

Here are the texts along with a thought or two about each one...

Saturday a.m.: Acts 4.1-21. Peter and John before the council. What the council recognized was that these were uneducated people and that they were men who had been with Jesus. That begs the question of us... how do people recognize that we have been with Jesus and how does that Grace get expressed in our lives.

Saturday after lunch: Acts 17.16-34: Paul before the Areopagus in Athens...God doesn't live in temples, God doesn't need our hands...but God chooses to use our hands....the purpose God has is that all nations would seek after God and feel their way toward God and find God...so, how is this mission focused on how we can be God's hands, hearts, and spirit in helping God fulfill God's purpose? And the unknown God, we know!!

Also, be praying about this event....constantly....get the leadership to do the same....please pray for the event in the mission as well as in public worship over the next weeks up until the event...these are both hand in glove sorts of things...

As before, any questions, please be in touch... I believe this covers the bases for the moment.

II. ACTS MINI-RETREAT—FRIDAY NIGHT/SATURDAY A.M. AND EARLY P.M. EVENT

This event should be done in an open manner that involves as many leaders as possible and invites others to come as well. It will work easily in groups of up to 40-50 people by using small groups to process the Bible studies.

1. Opening Worship (Led by the host pastor/official leader of the ministry)

Opening Words: The Great Commission and the Great Commandment

Summary: Be Disciples (Great Commandment) & go make more (Great Commission).

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20)

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. Now when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

The Great Commandment (Matthew 22:36-39)

[A Pharisee asked Jesus]: Teacher, which commandment is the greatest?

Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Brief Meditation on the texts: To be delivered by the pastor (or facilitator can do it if absolutely necessary).

Opening Prayer

Hymn: Choose one the congregation knows and likes

2. Bible Study – Acts 9:1-19

- A. Give each person a piece of paper (8.5 by 11 inch) and some crayons/markers/colored pencils etc. with which they can draw.
- B. Tell each person to fold their paper in half. This gives them 4 sections, 2 on each side.
- C. Read the text aloud for the group to listen to. Set the stage, ask them to get settled in their chairs, close eyes, relax, feel the weight of their head, shoulders, arms, legs...let the anxiety/worries/preoccupations of the day drain away...

After reading the text slowly, invite people back to the moment, then read the following questions one at a time allowing about 8 to 10 minutes for each. Ask each person to use the crayons to draw a picture that represents the events and people in their lives in response to each of the above questions. Give them 8 to 10 minutes for each picture, then read the next question and give them some minutes for the next picture and so on.

Saul had an encounter with Jesus that changed his life. When did you first encounter Jesus? Draw a picture of that.

God used Ananias to help bring new life to Saul. Who in your life has God used to bring new life to you? Draw a picture of that.

God said that Saul had been “a chosen instrument” for God. What purpose does God have for your life? Draw a picture of that.

God also said that Saul would “suffer” for God. What will you need to give up for your congregation to be transformed? Draw a picture of that.

When everyone has drawn 4 pictures, one for each question about their life, then have them get into groups of 4 to 5 persons with people they don't know well. Each person should take at least 10 minutes to explain their stories using the pictures as object lessons. Expect this to take about 45 to 60 minutes. As each person finishes sharing their story the others in the group should then lay hands on the person and pray for them. Take turns telling the stories in the group and praying for each person.

When the groups are finished sharing, return to the large group for singing and a closing worship. The text for this I use most often is Acts 5.1-16.

Saturday Morning

3. 8 or 8:30 AM Start with worship led by a lay person: Acts 4.1-21 (People who know Jesus.)

4. About an hour and a half: Bible Study - Digging in to the Book of Acts

- A. Break into groups. Keep groups no more than 8 people per group. Count off by the number of groups needed depending how many are present. ***Do not let people self group.*** There should be a multiple of 3 groups so that an equal number of groups study each chapter.
- B. Give each group a chapter. If more than 3 groups are formed, give more than one group the same chapter to study. ***Do not give more than one chapter to any group to study!***
 1. Acts 2
 2. Acts 10
 3. Acts 16
- C. Have each group discuss the chapter. Each group will need to have a scribe to take notes to answer to the following questions. Each group should list *at least* 5-6 answers for each question, probably more.

The process is: First they pray together (first silently, then out loud, take at least 10 minutes to do this, be explicit and intentional about this), have them read the text and then spend roughly 10-12 minutes on each question. They have an hour altogether. The facilitator should help them keep on track with

the task and the time available:

1. What **were people of faith doing** in the chapter you studied?
(For example: prayer, public preaching, etc.)
2. What **was God doing** in this chapter?
3. What key **lessons would you say any church could learn** from this text?

D. Report back to large group (group scribe serves as primary reporter)

1. Large group facilitator records answers on newsprint or have each group put their responses on newsprint, one sheet for each question (my preference) and they use that for reporting back to the whole group.
2. Process each question for each group one at a time (for example, have group working on Acts 2 list all the things they found God doing in their text, then have group working on Acts 10 do the same, then the group working on Acts 16 do the same. Then move on to question 2 and repeat the cycle.)
3. Hang newsprint sheets on the walls

E. Close session with prayer and give group a 10 minute break.

5. 10:15 AM - Vision Session – after the hymn and prayer, this section is done in silence with only brief but clear directions from the leader. This exercise will take about an hour or so to accomplish.

Hymn: “Be Thou My Vision” (WOV # 776)

Prayer

Post It Note Exercise - **This is done in silence. Do not allow any conversations!!!**

Give Everyone 1 Post It Note.

2. Again, 10 Minutes of **Silent Prayer** and Reflection on their chapter – then, allow people to simply wander around the room **in silence** and reflect and pray as they read the newsprint notes from the morning session...about 10 minutes. **Be sure they remain silent and work and pray alone as they wander reading the morning newsprint reports from the groups!**
3. Write a one sentence purpose statement for the church using less than 12 words on a post it note or sheet of paper. Use the format: “God’s purpose for our church is...” and allow no more than 12 *additional* words in each statement.
4. Return to table and each participant writes a single purpose statement. Then, put the Post It Note on the wall **in silence**. The purpose notes go in a cluster on one wall. Make sure it’s a large wall with easy access for everyone at once.
5. Let participants read the notes **in silence** until everyone has read what everyone wrote.
6. Organize Post It Notes Into Categories. Allow the participants to move the notes into clusters of ideas so that all notes that describe purpose that seem to deal with related ideas are together. **People remain silent through this entire portion as well!!**
7. Finally, return to tables. Each table then negotiates one purpose statement from their table for their congregation. Put this on newsprint and be prepared to share it with everyone else. (This results in a purpose statement for each table).

6. Break

7. 11:30 AM - Biblical Guiding Principles: About 45 minutes.

Return to the same groups from the morning session.

A. Review the chapter you read previously. Same process, pray together first, then review it. Look at the major events of the chapter and the decisions and choices that people made. List all the principles that

you can see that were at work in that chapter. List as many as possible in about 30 minutes.

B. Identify the top five that your group sees in action. Put them on newsprint to share with everyone else.

8. LUNCH (30 minutes)

9. WORSHIP: A layperson should lead this. Acts 17.16-34

10. Share your top five Biblical guiding principles that you found. Hang them on a wall.

11. Congregational Guiding Principles: about an hour

A. Return to the same groups.

B. Repeat same experience from before. Pray for 10 minutes. Then circulate around the room reading what is on each of the sheets of newsprint about Biblical Guiding Principles. Again, done in silence.

C. Go back to your table. As a table group, pray, then negotiate 5 guiding principles from your table for your ministry. Put them on newsprint to share with others.

12. Share your guiding principles with everyone.

This should bring you to about 2 or 2:30 p.m. You have done good work.

See instructions in the next section for follow up work by the pastor and 2 to 4 people from the group. The purpose of this is to do consolidating, combining, and word-smithing on what everyone has done together.

Lead prayer (often the pastoral leader in that place), thank everyone, send them on their way.

After the event:

1. The leadership team will then take the results of the Bible study reports and the vision clusters and meet concerning them in the week following the planning. As a group they should begin to sort through key vision emphases and through the Biblical lessons. By including the Great Commission, the Great Commandment, and material from Acts this material will always be useful in building a vision and purpose statement for the congregation. In most cases, the majority of what you need will have been articulated during the event. List key emphases and concerns that are to be included in the vision and purpose statements. Begin to think about core values implied by the texts and the visions.
2. Assign one or two people from the Leadership team to write a draft statement of values and purpose.
 - A. The purpose should relate the mission of the Great Commandment and Great Commission and the material in Acts to the mission of the congregation in your setting. It should be concise, missional and outward in its focus, and contain both God=s mission and the congregation's focus as clearly as possible.
 - B. The vision should lift up the highest dreams of the clusters in the feedback groups. If key emphases are included in the cluster, the leadership team should put together a short but helpful paragraph that describes the congregation when these ministries are full and richly present. If the hopes in the clusters were realized, what would the congregation look like? The vision can be a paragraph but every word should matter. Don't let wordiness dominate a more powerful final form! In the clusters from the day's work you have area of emphasis for future planning. These can form the basis of organizing for the strategic planning which will follow in the coming months.

III. Acts Bible Study Process

Part One

Here's the process:

Ask people to choose dyads and triads to meet in. Their choice....but gender specific (men with men, women with women). This breaks up husbands and wives and it avoids other temptations. This takes you out of the driver's seat and puts them in charge.

Also ask the leadership team to choose their dyads or triads from those other than the leadership team. If you can get the council, committees, and others involved in this, that's a bonus and make the same request of them. That way, instead of just six or so doing the study, you'll have as many as two to three times the number of people on the leadership team and the council...a real bonus...

They choose when and where they meet. 6:30 a.m. at the coffee shop, noon at work, whenever...you just ask them to be accountable for when and where they meet.

When they meet the time is divided into three sections.

Section one: 10 minutes. Check in time. Relationship building. How's it been with you this past week? What's going on? The kind of stuff we do naturally when we greet people etc.

Section two: 20 minutes. Conversation about the text...assigned in two chapter increments for each week and to be read before arriving for the study. Questions to be asked: What is God doing in these two chapters? What are people doing in these two chapters? (sometimes at odds with God). What is the Holy Spirit doing? What lessons are here for the church in that day? What lessons are here for the church today? What is this telling us about a possible vision purpose for our ministry? These are the basic questions.

Others could be added: Where does the activity take place? What was old in this text? What was new? What kind of impact did reading this and praying about it have on you? etc.

There are no formal questions here. Its conversation about the text. Don't try to make this into a curriculum....

Section three: Prayer. Hard commitment to at least 15 minutes of prayer. What to pray for? Each other, of course, and what they heard as they checked in with each other. For the gift of the Word they have just encountered. For the ministry. For a vision for mission that God is raising up in them. For their ministry to be connected to the city and to real life....etc.... I ask that this time be a firm commitment. No less than 15 minutes! More if they wish but not less.

Add up the numbers: $10 + 20 + 15 = 45$ minutes. Longer than an hour and they are not doing the right work!

Hope this helps!