

Life! *Training*

Name:

Date:

Flex with Faith

*Are You Strong Enough
to Adapt to Life's
Changes?*

Welcome to this journey through the experiences and teachings of the apostolic church as recorded in the book of Acts and the Letters written by the apostles. As a member of His body, you will discover His treasures for those who take His Name and receive His Spirit.

Come to the Scriptures with a prayer-filled heart and open mind as you uncover truths for your life. Record these in the blanks provide to help keep yourself accountable in your daily growth. Talk to the Lord when you find yourself coming short in an area. Share with others the riches you find in His living Word.

Day 1: embellished Bible story.

Day 2-6: interactive journal devotions.

Day 7: contemporary stories of faith.

Be Ready

Sudden change can _____ or _____ one's faith.¹

God's best brings out the _____ and _____ in people.²

Holy Ghost outpourings are a _____ .³

May the _____ take those who use God for _____ .⁴

_____ could still have a _____ heart.⁵

One must take personal _____ of _____ .⁶

True _____ belongs to the _____, not a person.⁷

God leads us to _____; we take _____ .⁸

We _____ the Scriptures; God moves _____ .⁹

_____ living inspires the next _____ .¹⁰

¹ Acts 8:3-4; 11:19, 14:2-7; 16:24-33; Matthew 10:23; I Thessalonians 2:2

² 8:5-8, 9-13; I Kings 18:38-39; 19:1-2; John 2:11; 5:8-12; Luke 13:10-14

³ 8:14-17; 2:1-4, 42; 10:44-47; 11:17-18; 15:8-9; 19:4-6; II Timothy 1:5-6

⁴ 8:18-20; Daniel 5:17; Matthew 10:8; 27:3-5; Luke 14:7-11; I Timothy 6:9

⁵ 8:21-23; Deuteronomy 29:18-20; Matthew 6:22-24; John 8:34; Hebrews 12:15

⁶ 8:24; Exodus 10:17, I Samuel 12:19, 15:24-25; Luke 18:13; John 5:44; 12:43

⁷ 8:25; I Corinthians 12:7-30; Ephesians 4:10-14; II Tim. 4:11; Philemon 1:24

⁸ 8:26-29; 30-31; Isaiah 42:1-44:5; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 53; Psalm 22, 34, 69, 118

⁹ 8:32-35, 36-39; 10:22; 13:27, 42; Luke 6:3, 39; 8:10; 10:26-37; 24:27, 44-45

¹⁰ 8:40; 21:8; Proverbs 4:1-4; II Timothy 1:5-6; 3:14-15; I John 2:1, 12-14, 18

Focus Pocus

See Acts 8:1-24

I figured the preacher was just another Jewish zealot coming to tell us Samaritans we had missed the boat. Instead of another religious debate on “my church is better than yours,” however, he shared a message of hope.

Still, I was about to leave his dog-and-pony show when he caught my interest. He spoke to a man who could not walk and instantly the man stood up and walked. I was amazed at this trick. I had traveled the world looking for new tricks to add to my own show. I had tried black magic, fortune telling, and a whole lot of slight-of-hand. People were spell-bound (literally) by my abilities. I did not care for the popularity so much, but I wanted the money it brought.

I found myself following this Philip in amazement. I really liked his message. He was the first religious person I had heard make sense—and I felt power behind what he said.

The power amazed me. I had never seen a magician so confident before. He did not make big claims about himself or ask for money. He just did his thing. I had always been stressed out by my trade of trickery, but this man wore a smile. His tricks were so open, so bright and joyful.

I found out later, of course that these were not tricks and he was no showman. In fact, he was just a lackey. The big guns showed up later when they found out what he was doing. I and many of the people had already been baptized. These “apostle” guys from Jerusalem went around blessing the people with the same power Philip had.

That’s when I saw the opportunity. People wouldn’t have to run to me anymore for my tricks or incantations—they could work wonders themselves. I wanted to join the apostles in this business and asked if I could buy in as a partner. After all, I had been the great power in Samaria.

They didn’t like my suggestion. One apostle, the loud one, pierced my dark soul with sorrow when he said my money and I should jump in a lake—the lake of fire. He told me I was a prisoner of sin, holding onto grudges and feeding bitter envy toward others.

I begged him to forgive me.



See Acts 8:26-39

I was on my way back from worshipping in Jerusalem, when I ran into the most interesting person. Since official business for Queen Kandake had taken me to Jerusalem, I took my liberties of joining other God-fearers near the Temple. Being from Ethiopia, this was possibly a once-in a lifetime event for me.

I had traveled the world looking for the truth of life. I have seen all the tricks. I have all the money I need. I did not want just a show, I wanted something real. I did not just want to be a pilgrim to the Holy Land; I wanted to take part of it home with me. I managed to persuade someone to sell me a scroll of Isaiah and I was reading it out loud to myself as our carriage plodded on home.

The breathtaking splendor of the Temple seemed to elude the passages I read in Isaiah. Instead of learning about bigness and power, I read about a man of humility and suffering. I began to wonder how something great could come from something so small.

Just then, a man on foot overheard me and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading.”

Understand? After hearing the Rabbis, I got the impression the Holy Scriptures were not for understanding, but therapy. I was enjoying just being able to read my own copy of God’s Word. I never entertained the idea of comprehending it.

I baited this character to see if he was small-talking or if he really knew the Writings. “How can I understand,” I replied, “unless someone like you explains it?”

He joined me on board, and did just that. He told me the Man in those scriptures had died and come back from the grave to give us all hope. I told him I wanted to take on His name and Spirit right away. There, at an oasis, I plunged beneath the water, my sins washed away. Now I had a piece of what was holy, and it did not cost me a cent.

When I came back up, the man was gone, but the Power was not. I took this message home and told everyone.

Don't Wait for the Preacher

The woman with the fancy purse stands in shock while a masked man draws a gun on her and threatens her life. All around, people on the sidewalks stand and watch the scene unfold. Since none of the onlookers can seem to move, she hands over her belongings and the thief gets away.

Crowds create inertia. A victim has more chance of a heroic rescue when only one person notices the situation. All alone, you know you are the best person for the job (for lack of competition). In a group, people expect someone else to be better equipped or more qualified to step in.

In the church, we suffer the same way. A lost soul on a side street becomes a forgotten statistic because believers in your city keep expecting someone else to share the message. Philip did not wait around for someone better to come along. He was just been a worker in the church with no ordination, letters after his name, or "Rev." before it, either.

What did Philip do in Acts 8:5?

Who came later, in Acts 8:14?

If Philip had waited for a preacher to come do the job, one wonders if Samaria would have ever heard the gospel. What opportunities might you have lost by waiting for a "professional" to pray or witness?

What memorable experiences have you had by stepping out and doing what *you* could do rather than waiting for someone official to show up?

After Philip opened the work in Samaria, Peter and John carried it through by ministering to many more people in the cities of Samaria (Acts 8:25). Peter was the apostle to the Gentiles and won the first gentile family to the new faith in Jesus Christ. However, humble Philip, who had to leave Jerusalem because of the persecution, may have beat Peter to the honors. In Acts 8:27, Philip ministered to a man from what country?

Later, Peter and Paul would continue evangelism to “the ends of the earth.” In the meantime, Philip got ahead of the game plan by making himself available and following the leading of the Spirit. After leaving the Ethiopian, Philip traveled and ministered from city to city until he came to Caesarea where he seems to have settled down. Later, Peter came and ministered in these same areas where Philip had broken ground (8:40; 9:32-43).

The Catholic Church used to chain the Bible to the pulpit, making it off-limits to the average church-goer. Although people now have God’s Word in their hands, it seems the works of God and service of the ministry remain chained to the pulpit. Too many people feel that only preachers should pray for the sick. They think only “men of the cloth” are qualified to win the lost. Some believe you have to have a special gifting to help people receive the Spirit. God wants us to become unshackled from our traditions and see how much He can do through common people.

This is not to say we should have no respect for the ministry. King Saul sinned by disrespecting the anointed role of his minister and tried to replace him (I Samuel 13:8-14). We need the men and women God has called to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers for strength, maturity, and understanding of God’s Word.

Philip was willing to work for God without a title. He was fine with the apostles being involved and even taking over the leadership of his mission. Unlike King Saul, Philip did not seek his own glory.

Amazing the Amazing

In Samaria, Philip encountered a man called “The Amazing Power of God.” Mr. Amazing was amazed, however, when he saw the power of truth and holiness. In Acts 8:6-7, what was going on as Philip worked with God?

While many religions offer supernatural power, what made this demonstration unique from the powers of darkness, in Acts 8:8?

What spell had the magician cast over the people in Samaria, according to Acts 8:9-11?

In Acts 8:12, who did they change their allegiance to?

Watching his followers leave must not have been easy for Simon. Rather than grow hateful or hostile, however, he joined them. According to Acts 8:13, what did Simon do?

In that same scripture, what amazed this man?

When the new believers received the Holy Spirit, how did Simon react in Acts 8:18-19?

Simon of Samaria had a sticky-slimy attitude of selfishness. Instead of rejoicing in what God was doing for people, his scheming mind instantly set out to twist the situation for his own benefit. Most people would like to slap such a person. Peter did more. He slammed him with a stinging rebuke. What did Simon Peter tell Simon Magus, in Acts 8:20?

Some students of this passage argue that Simon of Samaria had just received the Holy Ghost. The scripture says he believed and was baptized (8:13), and the statement “they received the Holy Ghost” could include this magician (8:17). Notice, Simon did not offer money so he could receive the Spirit, but so he could give it to others. He might not have been so quick to market something he had not experienced.

Some Spirit-filled people today have issues like Simon Magus. What areas of your life could a spiritual person speak to you like Peter did to the sorcerer in 8:21-22?

Whatever the state of Simon’s spiritual man, it is clear he still had serious issues. More than just greed, what did Peter address as his underlying problem, in 8:23?

“Small men” seek ways to feel big. Have you ever struggled with the desire to have supernatural power in order to impress others or prove yourself worthwhile?

How can a believer overcome this weakness?

Tell the Whole Truth

Certain religious systems claim you are a Christian when you believe. To say this, they must also argue that you are filled with the Spirit when you believe. Changing up the biblical record, they say the Holy Spirit enters your heart and no external evidence is necessary. They stumble over this story of Philip, however, and must play football with the Greek to try and get it to follow their theology.

The simple story needs no commentary. In Acts 8:12, what happened?

And in 8:14-15, what happens after word of Philip's efforts got back to Jerusalem?

To make it painfully clear, Luke writes this out deliberately under the inspiration of the Spirit. In 8:16, what had happened before the apostles arrived?

Then, in 8:17, what new thing happened among these baptized believers?

If the Spirit was not an essential part of Christianity, Peter and John would not have come down. These men heard that the Samaritans (half-Jews) had accepted the truth in Jesus and wanted them to experience the promise as well.

How would your life be different if no one had prayed with you to receive the Holy Ghost?

Those who do not talk in tongues often point to Acts 8 to grasp for evidence that these people received the Spirit without tongues as on Pentecost. However, something dramatic obviously took place because Simon went from amazement to got-to-buy mode when the Spirit fell. Some say he wanted to buy the ability to give people joy. However, what does 8:8 say the people already had?

The narrative makes it clear about what caught Simon's attention. First, what was his background, in 8:9?

In 8:10, what did they call him?

In 8:13, what amazed Simon the Amazer?

Obviously, Simon was impressed by power. He wanted authority and control. He wanted to do impossible things that would make people amazed at him. What does Acts 1:8 say about those who receive the Spirit?

Simon was hoping to market more than warm fuzzies. He wanted power to do the impossible, and speaking in tongues fit that category. He understood that this same power worked the miracles he had seen.

This story does not encourage the notion of a quiet Holy Ghost experience. Few other chapters in the Bible give more evidence for the dramatic power of the Holy Ghost.

How does Luke 14:7-11 apply to Simon's desires?

Start at that Scripture

Philip sees an Ethiopian royal treasurer traveling down the road. What is the man doing, in Acts 8:28?

How did the evangelist get him talking, in 8:30?

Read the Ethiopian's response, in 8:31. How does this let you know the man was searching for salvation?

In 8:35, what did Philip do?

Many believers can present the gospel within their comfort zone. They may only be able to share their faith if they have their favorite Bible with all the right scriptures highlighted. Which of the following applies to you?

“I can present the gospel if...

- I have my favorite Bible study flipchart.”
- I have my favorite tract or gospel booklet.”
- I have my digital presentation guide.”
- I have a New Testament.”
- I have a King James Version.”
- I have any Bible version.”
- I have any scripture.”

Rather than being a runway evangelist, become a helicopter. Learn to take off from the point of a person's interest and bring them to full understanding of Jesus Christ. Are you ready to share the gospel right now or would you have to study first?

The Ethiopian official and Philip were discussing a translation of Isaiah 53. Jesus was the first rabbi to apply this passage to the Messiah (Isaiah 53:12; Luke 22:37). Most Jewish scholars believed the Messiah would be a reigning king, not a suffering servant. Jesus was both.

What significance do you see in Acts 8:32-33?

Turn to Isaiah 53 and jot down some points you would use from this passage to explain the gospel of Jesus Christ to someone.

Philip does not just discuss the facts about Jesus' life, but he includes personal application as well. What does this seeker say, in Acts 8:36, that lets us know Philip shared the whole truth with him?

Did Philip explain baptism from the Isaiah scroll? He could have used Isaiah 12 or 54:9-10 (I Peter 3:21). Or did he just make personal application from Jesus' death and burial? We do not know. The point is he knew how to skillfully show a seeker how to enter covenant with the Savior.

Could Philip have explained the promise of the Spirit from Isaiah 55:1? Could this be Jesus' source in John 7:37?

Rapture Practice

God loves to surprise us. He surprised the Samaritans with miracles and brought joy to this oppressed village. Sometimes God uses the supernatural to spark faith in people who are inclined to follow Him. Other times, He uses miracles to confirm the faith of those who already believe, as He did in the case of the Ethiopian.

Acts chapter 8 begins and ends with joy, as well. In the beginning of Philips ministry in Samaria, the people experienced joy. This was externally motivated by seeing the miracles and experiencing forgiveness of sins.

In Acts 8:39, what state of heart did Ethiopia's Chief Financial Officer have as he continued home?

This kind of joy came from within. While those outside the kingdom may experience surprise joy when they see God's goodness, those who have entered can walk in deep joy, flowing from the Spirit of God within them. What kind do you experience most?

- Joy from what God has done for me.
- Joy I find in Spirit-filled prayer and worship.

Mission accomplished, Philip was free to go. What does 8:39-40 say happened to him?

This is not an isolated miracle. In II Corinthians 12:2, what does the Apostle Paul tell us about?

What did he not know about how this happened?

God can do anything. If he wants to instantly transport a person from one place to another, He will. Jesus did this before and after His crucifixion (John 8:59; 20:19). We should not limit God to our calendars, budgets, or plans. Earth's gravity applies to flesh, not God's Spirit in us.

Some people, however, claim we should seek after these things. One such person is a charismatic spokesperson named John Crowder. He teaches people to seek dramatic demonstrations such as levitation and miraculous relocation. He encourages his followers to be totally drunk on the Holy Spirit all the time. It seems movements like this go from seeking the supernatural to entering the *stupor*-natural realm. What dangers do you see in this?

While charlatans like Simon Magus still twist things for their own gain or personal power trips, we should not let them discourage us from understanding God's abilities.

What instant transport *can* you expect to happen and look for in your life, according to I Thessalonians 4:17?

This hope is available for all who will follow the example of the man on the wilderness road. Jewish law rejected this man for two reasons: he was a eunuch (Deuteronomy 23:1), and a gentile. However, God promised He would allow rejects in the new covenant (Isaiah 56:4-5).

Jesus also removed age and religious limitations (Luke 9:49-50; 18:16). What does Galatians 3:28 say about any who enter this new covenant?

Taking on “The Great Power”

Missionary Bill Drost once visited a Columbian outlaw:

El Terrible was, of course, aware of all that went on. He sent word down that night asking Bill to come up into his territory as he would like to speak to him....

The soft shrieking of wind and the torment of the rain gave the place an even more sinister aspect. Without a word they were led over to the largest house, which was surrounded by a verandah. People were crowded into every space of both house and verandah....

There was no point in standing there doing nothing, and feeling free in the Spirit, Bill decided to begin a church service with this unusual congregation.... At the end of the message he gave the undaunted invitation. “Who wants to take Jesus Christ and be baptized?”...

[Fear] swept over the audience....[Juan] stepped forward. “I wish to be baptized,” he announced.

All eyes were now on him, for they knew El Terrible had threatened Juan with death should he submit to baptism. Juan knew too many secrets. The only way such a man could leave was to die. He was now in open rebellion....

[Bill Drost] once more told them of their need to believe in Jesus and be baptized. Now he called Juan into the water. The men on the ledge stiffened and drew their guns simultaneously. There was an ominous click as they cocked them and pointed them with one accord at Juan. Juan caught the movement but, controlling a wave of fear, walked forward into the pool....

Juan, under the pointed pistols, gave a broken testimony in a tremulous voice. The two men were now looking at each other. Oblivious to the danger all about them, Bill put one hand on the head of his friend, the other behind his shoulders, and called over him the name of Jesus.

At that moment there was a tremendous screech, accompanied by the falling figure of a huge man. The man landed in front of Bill, splashing into the water. There was no doubt about who the one-eyed face before him belonged to: El Terrible. His one eye looked into both of Bill’s; his crossed

pistols, still cocked, dangled by his side. But in that wail something had broken. It was as though the old spirit had been wrenched from the man.

In shaky voice he said, "I too want to be baptized. I have been a terrible man, but I want to be a new man, and I want what Juan has. I forbade him to be baptized, and now I see he is determined. I know it is real."

And, Bill knew, this man too was real. Without hesitation, without waiting even for El Terrible to remove his pistols, Bill immersed the old rebel in the water. The unconscious symbolism of the guns also being soaked had a profound effect upon the onlookers. El Terrible rose out of the water calling with all his formidable gusto on the name of Jesus. It broke the ice, and a number of the rebels came forward for baptism.

That day seventeen were baptized, including El Terrible's son and wife. Later they had a prayer meeting that lasted the whole night, El Terrible and the others were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. His life was truly changed from being that of a beast to that of human being.

The next day he came to Bill, concerned, telling him that he felt he should give himself up to the law. Bill thought he should wait a while, but El Terrible was determined to do it immediately. Meanwhile, news spread throughout the mountains that El Terrible had become a son of God. He did what he could to make amends to those he had wronged before going down with Bill to see the state authorities.

On hearing the story and meeting El Terrible, the authorities graciously gave him a pardon. When he returned to his mountains, however, others were not so forgiving and wanted to take things over. Within three weeks of his conversion El Terrible was gunned down one night. Nobody knew who killed him, but he died in victory, with the smile of God on his face. When the news of all these events filtered out, such was the impact that Time magazine published an account of them. El Terrible is dead, but the work today goes on in those remote mountains.¹

¹ Bill Drost *The Pentecost*, Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame: 1983, 162-67.

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Acts 8:12, 35-36

But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women....

Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

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