

Life! *Training*

Name:

Date:

Knocked Around

*Holding Together When
Life is Tearing
You Up*

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.

Glorify God in Everything

Look for what ____ is _____, not what is _____.¹

Inspire others by simply _____ the _____.²

_____ people, live right, _____ many.³

_____ breeds cheerfulness.⁴

God allows things we _____.⁵

God's people handle _____ with continual _____.⁶

God uses hard knocks to ___ His people ____.⁷

God knocks _____ down to destruction and sorrow.⁸

Nothing will stop _____ among people of faith.⁹

¹ Acts 11:1-3; 8:14-15; 10:34-38, 45; 14:27; 15:3; Luke 15:2; Romans 15:7-12

² 11:4-18; 19-21; Exodus 13:8-18; Joshua 4:5-7; Mark 4:34; Luke 1:3; 14:7-24

³ 11:22-26; 4:34-37; 6:3, 5, 9:27; Psalm 37:23; 112:5; Hebrews 10:19-26, 32-39

⁴ 11:27-30; 2:44-45; I Corinthians 16:2; II Cor. 8:2-4, 8:12-14; I Peter 4:9-11

⁵ 12:1-4; 6-19; Job 6:8; 7:11-15; 10:18; 21:7; Isaiah 53:10; Romans 2:4-5; 11:22

⁶ 12:5; 12-16; Matthew 18:19-20; I Thessalonians 5:17; Heb. 13:3; James 5:16

⁷ 12:7; 9:3; Exodus 5:14-21; Daniel 3:16-30; I Cor. 1:23; 2:2; Galatians 6:14

⁸ 12:20-23; 10:25-26; Ezekiel 28:2, 9; Daniel 4:30-37; 6:7; Jude 1:6; II Thes. 2:4

⁹ 12:24; 5:39; 6:7; 11:21; 19:20; Proverbs 28:28; Matthew 16:18; Ro. 8:37-39

Punched by an Angel

See Acts 12

I had done this before, and it seemed like another easy job. Of course, for an angel, not much is too difficult when we have orders from Central Dispatch.

See, I had done a jailbreak in this city before—in fact, I had sprung the same guy before when he was locked up with the other apostles. I checked by GPS (galaxy positioning system) and made sure I was on target. I discovered that this was not the same jail I had gone to before.

Last time, I had sprung the church leaders out of the Temple jail which was minimum security. This time, the Apostle Peter was locked down in Herod's fortress dungeon. King Herod must have heard about my last jailbreak success because he was not allowing any room for escape this time.

At the fortress I assessed the situation—two guards patrolled the hallway in front of Peter's cell. Inside, two guards were chained to him—one on each arm. Talk about overkill—they were treating this preacher like a serial murderer or something.

I made sure the guards would not wake up (I will not tell you how I did this—it is one of our top-secret angel tricks). Then, I slammed on the light. The room blazed with light brighter than the sunrise—but this preacher was in slumber-land and did not even flinch.

I had to laugh at the paradox here. I had been empowered to bring Peter out because of the church's prayers. These people were so concerned he would die tomorrow that they were up all night praying for him. And here he was snoring on a cold stone floor.

I gave him a good thump in the side and he jerked awake. I pulled him up into sitting position and told him, "Get up, quick!" The chains fell off his arms and he stood up, rubbing his eyes.

"Get your belt on," I encouraged him, "and lace up your sandals." He found his personal effects and fumbled to pull himself together. He did not seem to take all of this seriously at the moment. He just kept blinking and yawning while I hurried him along. I was afraid I would have to dress

a grown man. Finally, he had his sandals on. I reminded him to grab his robe—he would need it out in the chilly night air.

“Follow me,” I said.

He stumbled along behind, mumbling something about this being a nice dream. Humans. You give them the best you got, and they credit their imagination.

I made sure the two guards outside the door could not see us, and I led Peter out to the exit. It was a giant iron door and by the power of the Most High, it opened without us even touching it. I led the preacher up to first intersection where I knew he could figure out where he was. Then I disappeared.

Peter, realizing this was more than a dream, spun around, looked back at the castle he had just escaped, and said, “Now I know it is real! The Lord sent his angel to get me out of Herod’s clutches and save me from the Jews’ plans.” He took off down the street to tell the church.



Later, I had to come back on another detail involving King Herod. This time, I was not going to his dungeon but to the theatre. He sat on his throne in a way-over-the-top robe sparkling in the sunlight.

Amazed at his great oratory skills, the people chanted, “It is the voice of a god and not a man.” You should have seen the look on Herod’s face as he looked up and saw me. It was nothing like the look on Peter’s face when he first saw me.

I have always been fascinated by the effect I have on people. When the light shines, it reveals what is in their hearts. Darkness cringes and runs in terror from the light of the Holy One. A pure conscience, however, welcomes light.

I wanted to give the guy a good lecture about not trying to play God, but that was not my assignment. So, I got down to business. I gave him a swift jab in the gut. He fell down on the spot, groaning in pain.

His cronies dragged him off and hoped for the best, but he was so wormy he soon died. I did not put the worms there; I just brought to the surface what was hidden inside.

God’s work went on, in spite of this little sideshow.

Focus of Faith

The news industry has a slogan: “Good news is no news.” In other words, no one tunes in or buys extra copies when reporters cover fundraisers and publicity events for charities. An 18-car pileup, an EF5 tornado, or a 100-foot tsunami, however, boost the ratings. People love bad news.

Believers should not be like the world. Unfortunately, the stories that spread fastest in the church are tales of who messed up or what went wrong at the business meeting. Too quickly, we forget how many were filled with the Holy Ghost or baptized in Jesus’ Name.

When Simon Peter went to Caesarea and preached the gospel to Cornelius’s Gentile home, what bad news did the believers in Jerusalem focus on, in Acts 11:3?

Why had they not heard about the Spirit being poured out? Perhaps this was “no news” because it was not as juicy as hearing that Peter had backslidden (in their eyes) by leaving Jewish customs behind and eating at a Gentile table.

What kind of stories do find yourself repeating from church? Are you more likely to repeat someone’s testimony or the sordid details of a prayer request?

Rather than have a fit when he heard what the rumor mills were spreading, Peter started from the beginning and explained the good news about his experience. After hearing his story, how did these believers respond, in Acts 11:18?

The best way to shut up gossipers is to tell them good news. They, like anyone, need something to be thankful for and may not be used to hearing praiseworthy reports. You will either influence them or bore them to extinction.

Stories. When you chat with friends, you are either inspiring or demotivating them. The Bible is full of stories. Some inspire you to live right. Others discourage you from copying the behavior of those in the narrative. Since telling tales is more powerful than just bossing people around, Jesus told many. When you tell people what God has done in your life, you are inspiring them to live for Him.

How have you seen your testimony impact people more than just telling them “You gotta obey Acts 2:38”?

What other “stories” have you told or could you tell that give people positive motivation for godliness?

What story do you hear? Are you among those accusers of Peter who got in his face with, “You broke the rules with Gentiles”? Or are you one who would hear that the “Gentiles broke into the kingdom”?

After Stephen’s death, many had traveled around the empire preaching the gospel. However, who did they preach to, in Acts 11:19?

After Peter’s story gets around, who did they start sharing the gospel with, in 11:20?

What was the result of this story-telling, in 11:21?

What happened with this new good news, in 11:22?

Called a “Christian”

“And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch” (Acts 11:26). Why not in Jerusalem? Why not in Samaria? Something was unique about the church in Antioch that they should get the signature name for Christ’s body.

This church sprang up by believers reaching the lost. These people were not preachers or pastors. They just told the story and brought many into the kingdom. Therefore, a “Christian” shares the gospel and wins souls without needing credentials or ordination papers.

When the mother church in Jerusalem heard about the growth in Antioch, what did they do, in Acts 11:22?

This man’s name means “encourager.” In Acts 11:23, what did he do that lived up to what everyone called him?

These Christians in Antioch must have made true life changes, because Barnabas could *see* the effects of God’s grace upon them. What do you think he saw that made these new believers stand out from their old lifestyles?

Barnabas was not a discourager. He did not go around pushing his religion on these newborn Christians. By careful encouragement, he nurtured them into the fullness of living for God. What aspects of his character do you need, in 11:24?

After working with the saints in Antioch for a while, Barnabas saw an opportunity to encourage Saul, who had recently left Jerusalem under awkward conditions. In 11:26, what did he do to include this man and help his ministry?

Nicknames. Antioch had a reputation for giving them. “Christian” comes from the Latin, not Greek or Hebrew. These ungodly Romans probably invented the term to mimic a name they used to make fun of the emperor’s fan club. It also sounded like a word they used for slaves.

Rather than let public ridicule intimidate them, these Christians set a model for the world to see them as distinct from any other religious movement.

When a prophet from Jerusalem spoke in Antioch, what did he warn them of, in Acts 11:28?

Rather than just let their brothers and sisters suffer through famine and hardship, in 11:29, what did the new church on the block do for the believers in the Holy City?

Read the account of Barnabas in Acts 4:36-37. How much do you think he influenced Antioch’s generosity?

They sent the offering to Jerusalem by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. This became a test run for a future trip they would send these beloved leaders on, as Christianity’s first official missionaries.

More than just birthing a label, Antioch set a standard for every Christian to live up to. Compare yourself to their definition of Christianity and mark which apply:

- Encouraging others
- Visible changes after conversion
- Spontaneous growth
- Spiritual gifts in operation
- Generous giving
- Sending missionaries

Before you are officially called Christian, what do you need to work on from this list?

Why Did God Hit Me?

Sometimes God lets things happen that leave us wondering what on earth He was thinking. Unfortunately, God is not on earth and He does not think like us. Most find it unproductive to demand a “Why?” answer from Him. What did God allow to happen to a leader of the Jerusalem church, in Acts 12:1-2? Do you think the people asked why?

What happened to another leader, in 12:3-4?

Facing another life-threatening situation, what did the body of believers do, in 12:5?

They could have wallowed in self-pity and blamed God. Instead, they got aggressive and decided to pray until something happened to stop the evil. Modern people often have a backward worldview. We often think Christianity is about what you cannot do, rather than what internal blessings you get. We think good is normal and assume evil is a diversion from the ordinary. Really, bad things happen all the time, and only praying people divert the ordinary.

Most people in Peter’s place would worry themselves to ill health. What was he doing, in 12:6?

An angel led him out, and Peter finally realized he was free. If a person were asking God “why” questions, a good one would be “Why did you scare me to death if you were just going to get me out in the end?” How do you explain God’s inaction for James and last-minute action for Peter?

Punched. Sometimes that is how you feel after God lets life catch you by surprise. Tragedy or human cruelty can knock the wind out of you. While you lay there sucking air, you ask the typical questions of “What? Why?” and so on.

Someone might have said James did something wrong and that is why God let him die. Maybe that same person would blame Jesus for His own death. John Baptizer died for standing up for truth. Jesus stood there watching Stephen die but did not deliver him from his persecutors. The real question is: “Why did Peter get to live?”

Then there are the people who should have died at birth. King Herod Agrippa I was one such person. He not only murdered James and tried to kill Peter, but he had other issues as well. Manipulating a neighboring country, he got the people to depend on him as their food supplier. Not only did he control their resources, but he began to control their minds. Decked out in dazzling clothing, he appeared before the crowd and read a great speech from the teleprompter.

How did these heathen people react, in Acts 12:22?

Herod did not deflect their worship but enjoyed it. What did the angel do to him, in Acts 12:23?

How did the angel get Peter’s attention, in Acts 12:7?

The Bible uses the same word in both verses when describing how the angel struck these men. It does not matter who you are, God can strike you. What matters is what is inside you. Herod was already wormy with pride and greed. Struck by God, that is what came out of him.

Peter was free on the inside and full of love for God. When the angel struck him, his chains came off and praises went up. We do not have total control over what God does. We cannot even understand what God does. You can make sure, however, the right thing will come out when He strikes you. Take a look inside and see what might come out of you.

Christ-like vs. God-like

You cannot be like God. You can only pursue being like Jesus. Even Jesus was not God-like. While these statements may startle you, read Philippians 2:5-9 and jot down what they tell you about Jesus.

Some people have a God-complex. If they had been Jesus, they would have commanded ten thousand angels to rescue them from death and they would have spoken to the cross and sent it to the depths of the sea. Jesus, however, submitted Himself to senseless suffering.

By seeking to be like Jesus, you admit you do not understand everything and will let God have control even when you do not understand. People with a God-complex try to take over the universe.

Sometimes miracles can go to your head. In Jesus' most dramatic experiences, what did He tell His human companions? See Matthew 17:1-9; Luke 5:14; 8:56.

Simon Peter learned this art of humility. When he went to preach to Cornelius, he did not present himself as some big shot. Instead, he admitted that he was still growing and told them what God had just taught him.

What did Cornelius try to do, in Acts 10:25?

What did Peter do, in 10:26?

How was this different from Herod's response?

Godhood. You will never fake it until you make it. Jesus was human. When you begin to think of yourself as something better than others or see yourself as divine and infallible, you have already fallen into the pit of pride.

Rather than let worms come out when you are struck by God, let the blood and water of compassion flow from your heart that breaks for the sins of the world. Here is what it means to be Christ-like:

- Live simply, not expecting privileges
- Pray deeply
- Tell stories to inspire faith
- Ask questions to make people think
- Do not try to be known
- Minister to underdogs
- Stay out of trouble
- Love without prejudice
- Get away and recoup
- Don't listen to your critics

How do you measure up?

Herod loved praise. You can live for approval by men or God. Those who put themselves forward as something more divine than others are usually those who have quit trying to live approved by the Lord. Rather than seek His favor, they replace Him by putting self on the eternal throne.

Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, the Prince of Tyre, and the antichrist are all tried to take the place of God. Why did God strike Herod down, in Acts 12:23?

What areas of your life do you need to give God more glory? Are you giving all the credit to Whom it belongs?

Acts of the Angels

We are studying the book of the Bible called, “The Acts of the Apostles.” Perhaps the subtitle should include a reference to angels as well. The wall between the physical world and the unseen realm becomes almost transparent in the Book of Acts. Angels talk to, protect, and strike down human beings.

Angels are involved in your life, too. Jacob knew God’s angel had been involved in many aspects of his colorful life. He prayed that the same angel that had blessed him would do the same for his descendants (Genesis 48:16).

What does Psalm 91:11 promise the righteous person?

What does Jesus tell us about angels in Matthew 18:10? What does this mean to you, as one of His little ones?

How many angels are there? Hebrews 12:22 tells us.

So, let’s examine the impact of these invisible creatures that appear to God’s saints from time to time. In Acts 1:10-12, what did angels do?

In Acts 5:19-20 and 12:7-10, what did an angel do?

Servants. That's what God sees angels as. People often think of them as superheroes. However, they just go about doing things that are no big deal for God. We are amazed because these powers are outside the normal realm of our abilities. God is not amazed by the supernatural. He is amazed, however, when humans have faith enough in Him for His power to work.

Some misguided people make prayers to angels and turn from following God to seeking His messengers. A mail carrier may deliver a package or letter from a loved one, but that delivery person does not replace your loved one. Remember Whom you are communicating with.

Some people have been so overwhelmed by an angelic encounter that they fell down to worship these heavenly creatures. What did John discover when attempting this, in Revelation 19:10 and 22:8?

Others are so overwhelmed by those who work the supernatural power of God, they want to worship them. Cornelius was so amazed by his angelic encounter and the power of the Spirit on Peter that he fell down before the man. The apostle corrected him and put honor where it was due.

We should be careful, while pursuing spiritual things, not to become self-exalted when seeing God's power, nor to put too much emphasis on angels. What danger should we avoid from Colossians 2:18?

Notice that angels are just part of the story. When Philip received a message from an angel to go to the wilderness road, he did not start a TV series about it. Angels served Jesus, but He did not make them His message.

What final service will angels give you, according to Luke 16:22?

Angels Today

True testimonies from a man of God:

Thursday afternoon I got a call from home saying that Brother Robert Phelps in our church had died, and before he died he had requested that I preach his funeral. I didn't want to leave the revival, but I felt that I should return home.

"Brother Beshear, why don't I fly home for the funeral? I'll leave my car for you. Just take me to the airport and pick me up when I return. Then I can continue the revival."

He agreed. I made preparation to return home and laid my clothes that I'd need on the bed. Since it was two and a half hours until my flight left, I lay across the bed for a nap. "Wake me up in time for my flight, Brother Beshear."

As I lay there, an angel came down on me like fire. A heaviness covered me, and I felt as if I were pressed into the mattress. It was a pressure I had never experienced. It didn't frighten me. I knew it was the angel of the Lord. He just kept pressing me into the bed. I couldn't have gotten up if I had wanted to.

A voice said to me, "Look." As I turned my head to look, in a vision I saw a huge plane flying very low. I saw little planes flying under it.

Then I noticed little caskets that seemed about a foot long—from my vantage point—and they were falling one by one out of the plane and dropping to the earth.

It seemed that the small planes under the big plane tried to catch the caskets but missed every one of them. Although I was still on the bed, in this vision I was standing. I counted 117 caskets falling from that plane and hitting the ground.

As the vision faded I was baffled as to what all this meant to me. What was God trying to tell me? Why was I pressed into that mattress under such a heavy power of the Spirit?

The pressure lifted from me. I got out of bed and said to Brother Beshear, "Pack your suitcase and get your clothes out of the closet while I call Pastor Riley about having to

leave the revival to conduct the funeral. When we get on the road, I'll tell you about it and explain why I'm not flying."

I explained to Brother Riley that it would be too much driving for me to go home and then return to conclude the revival. I hated to close the revival, but I felt it was what I should do. I told Brother Beshear about the unusual experience I had at the motel.

As Brother Beshear and I drove out of Hot Springs, we turned on the car radio and a special announcement came on. "We have just gotten a special report that the plane that took off from Hot Springs has crashed."

Brother Beshear looked at me and grunted, "What do you think about that?"

"I'm glad I wasn't on it," I responded.

"Wonder when they're going to tell how many were on the flight?" he asked.

The announcer continued, "One hundred and seventeen people lost their lives in the crash."

It gave me goose bumps. It was the exact number I had seen in the vision. God had some plans for my life and saved me from an untimely death.¹



Last year I was lying in my bed when I looked over to the right, and there stood an angel. I had never seen one like this one. He had a band that came around his head, and all I could see was his face and fingers.

He was looking away from me with his right shoulder turned toward me, and he quoted Revelation 22:16: "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches." I thought he would go on, but he stopped right there. He moved around and looked at me. In his fingers the angel held a piece of iron about threefourths of an inch in diameter and about two and a half inches long. He looked at me and said, "I melt cancer like iron is melted in the furnace of fire."²

¹ James O. Russell, *The Coal Miner Preacher*, Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame, 1993, 72-74.

² *Ibid.*, 108.

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Life! Journal

Acts 12:6-7, 21-23

And when Herod would have brought him forth,
the same night Peter was sleeping
between two soldiers, bound with two chains:
and the keepers before the door kept the prison.
And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him,
and a light shined in the prison:
and he smote Peter on the side,
and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly.
And his chains fell off from his hands....
And upon a set day Herod,
arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne,
and made an oration unto them.
And the people gave a shout, saying,
It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.
And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him,
because he gave not God the glory:
and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.

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