

THE BOOK OF ACTS



UNSTOPPABLE GOD

**THE CONTINUING MISSION OF JESUS
THROUGH THE CHURCH**

**PART I:
WEEKS 1-6**



"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

ACTS 1:8

THE BOOK OF ACTS



UNSTOPPABLE GOD

THE CONTINUING MISSION OF JESUS THROUGH THE CHURCH

Welcome! During the next twelve weeks, our desire is to help you grow as a fully-devoted follower of Jesus Christ. This book is your guide to lead you into engaging God and others in a spiritual journey. Write in it, keep it with you, bring it to your group studies, and share all your discoveries with others.

Here are some of the helpful sections in this book:

2.....Introduction to *Unstoppable God*

3.....Rhythms of Faith

4.....Introduction to Acts

6.....SOMA

8-47.....Weeks 1-6: Notes, Devotions & Discussion

26.....Prayer & Fasting Experience

40.....Generosity Experiment

48.....Persecuted Church Map

50.....Historical Stories of Transformation & Faith

Why Study Acts?

INTRODUCTION TO 'UNSTOPPABLE GOD'

Pandemic. Lockdown. Censorship. Government overreach. Consumerism. Tech obsession. Total self-autonomy. Gender and sexuality confusion. Racial wounds. Isolation. Fragmentation. Violence. Depression, drug use, and alcoholism.

How many times have you heard something that happened at school, on the news, or on your friend's social feed and it caused you to cry out, "What's next?" in disillusion and despair? How you ever wondered, "How can the church possibly make it with everything that's going on?"

During the next 12 weeks, South Shores Church is taking an important journey through the first 12 chapters of the book of Acts. In this book we see that Jesus' mission to bring reconciliation between God and humans continues through the church because of the incredible power and plans of an **UNSTOPPABLE GOD**.

Join us as we following the travels, obstacles, and teachings of the disciples and witness how the Holy Spirit takes the unimpressive ingredients of the early church (uneducated fishermen without their teacher) and makes the impossible possible.

During this study you will

- see the continuation of Jesus' ministry
- better understand the work of the Holy Spirit
- learn how to follow Christ faithfully in the face of opposition
- be challenged to pray for and share with the lost
- and most of all, get excited about God's continuing unstoppable work today.

Our hope is that seeing God's work in the first century increases our faith for God's work in the 21st century, so that when we ask the question, "What's next?" it's not in despair, but in a victorious sense of optimism for what God will do through His church at large and through us right here in South Orange County.

Derick Zeulner

Associate Pastor
South Shores Church

P.S. For a great Acts overview: search "*Acts Part 1 Bible Project*" on YouTube.



Getting the Most Out of this Study

RHYTHMS OF FAITH

We believe growth happens as you are involved in certain rhythms of the faith.

DAILY DEVOTIONS

We believe God wants to meet with you as you read His Word. There are 5 days of scripture reading for each week with a curated mix from Acts, the Gospels, and some other readings from Old and New Testaments. These readings and the insights you glean from them will form the foundation of your group discussions. Try to give yourself 20 minutes to complete the reading and **SOMA** each day.

WEEKLY SERMONS

We believe God has gifted us for the building up of the church body. Join us Sunday mornings in-person or online to deepen your understanding and application of the Book of Acts.

GROUP TIME

We believe God wants you to journey with others. These weekly gatherings will be a place of encouraging one another by sharing what God is teaching you in your devotional time, as well as a source for prayer and service.

PRAYER & FASTING

We believe that God works through prayer. Prayer will be an important component of your daily reading and your group time. Additionally we're excited to challenge everyone to set aside a time of fasting and do a focused prayer project. **(p. 26)**

EMBRACE GENEROSITY

We believe we're stewards of God's resources. We are offering a special "Generosity Experiment" to coincide with week five's readings. The goal is not to get into your wallet, but open your eyes, heart, and hands. **(p. 40)**

SERVE THE COMMUNITY

We believe that our love for Jesus will spill out into the community. Our hope is that each group will find a way to serve the community in a relational way. You can start brainstorming with your group from the beginning of a way to make an impact with a real need in the name of Jesus. **(Instructions in Part II)**

SHARE YOUR STORY

We believe that God is continually in the business of life transformation. He has worked in your life and He wants to work through you to transform others. As we share our stories (testimony or other instances of God's work in your life) with our group, we'll also be prayerfully looking for opportunities to share our story and God's story (the gospel) with others. **(Instructions in Part II)**

Introduction to Acts

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c. A.D. 33/34

Pentecost,
conversion of Paul

c. A.D. 46–57

Paul's missionary
journeys

c. A.D. 64–67

Peter and Paul
martyred in Rome

AUTHOR & DATE

Acts is a sequel to the Gospel of Luke. Both were written by Luke, a physician who traveled with the apostle Paul. Acts ends with Paul under house arrest, awaiting trial before Caesar, c. A.D. 62. Many scholars assume Acts was written then because it does not record Paul's defense, release, and further gospel preaching.

MAIN THEME

The Holy Spirit empowers believers to declare the gospel among both Jews and Gentiles. In doing so they establish the church. The church is the fulfillment of God's promises from the beginning of time.

PURPOSE

Luke's purpose for writing his Gospel (see Luke 1:3–4) applies to Acts as well: to give an "orderly" account of the early church after Christ's resurrection. Dedicating the two-volume work to Theophilus, Luke wanted him to have "certainty" about what he had been taught.

KEY THEMES

Acts tells of the witness of the early church to the truth of the gospel—a theme first introduced in 1:8:

- The witness is worldwide—Judea, Samaria, the "end of the earth" (1:8).
- The witness includes all kinds of people (chs. 2–5; 10:1–11:18; 14:8–18; 16:11–15, 25–34; 17:22–31).
- God guides the church's witness (4:5–22; 23:12–22; 24:1–23; 27:21–26).
- Faithful witnesses must be prepared to suffer and even die because of their testimony to Christ (5:41–42; 7:54–60).
- The Holy Spirit empowers the witness (1:8; 2:1–13; 8:17; 13:2–12; 19:6).
- Effective witness demands unity in the church (2:42–47; 4:32–37; 5:12–14).
- Jesus' resurrection is a key part of the witness (1:22; 2:22–36; 17:30–31).
- Acceptance of the message depends both on human response and on God's sovereign will (2:47; 11:18; 13:48).
- The witness to the gospel calls for a response (26:27–29). It requires repenting of one's sins in the name of Christ. This brings forgiveness of sins (e.g., 2:38).
- Witnesses must always maintain integrity before the world (18:12–15; 23:29; 25:18; 26:31–32).
- Christian witnesses continue the ministry that Christ "began" (1:1).
- Faithful witness can bring great results (4:4; 13:48–49; 17:4; 28:30–31).

SOMA

BIBLE STUDY METHOD

SOMA* is an easy-to-use Bible study method for jumping into a passage and mining its riches. This method can be repeated with any passage of the Bible and used for personal Bible reading, one-on-one bible study, and small group bible study. Our hope and prayer is that our church body could learn this method over time and have confidence in reading the Bible on their own, as well as with others.

**Fun fact: 'Soma' is the Greek word for 'body,' which is really what this is all about: building up the body of Christ, the church.*

S Soak: Read the passage slowly asking the Holy Spirit to open it to you. We want to soak in it, marinate, steep in it, asking the Spirit to guide us into the scriptures and notice its surroundings.

We want to ask questions about the context of the passage in these areas:

- Genre: What kind of writing is this? Narrative? Poem? Letter?
- Circumstances: Who is writing this? To whom? Are there any clues as to why? Maybe the Israelites are worshipping idols again. Maybe Paul is in prison again. Maybe the Corinthians messed up again.
- Connection to the rest of the story: Where does this passage fit in to the rest of the book? What has happened so far?

O Observe: Once we've soaked in passage, we want to make sure we are able to see all that is really there. Not interpreting, but taking note of what is present.

We want to ask observation questions of the text:

- What are the key words? Are there any words or ideas that are repeated?
- What do you learn about the main characters? How are they described by the author?
- Is time or place significant in this passage?
- Is there a conflict?
- Are there any surprises?
- Do you have any questions from the passage? Is there anything difficult to understand or something you'd like to ask the author?

M Meaning: Now that we've gotten familiar with the passage, knowing what is there, we want to get at its meaning. The meaning of the passage doesn't come from us, but from the author. Instead of asking questions like: "What does this passage mean to me?", we want to ask questions like: "What is the author trying to say?"

Here are some questions to help arrive at the meaning:

- What is the main point of the passage? What is the author really trying to get across?
- How could you sum up the meaning of this passage in your own words?
- What does this passage reveal about who Jesus is, and what he came into the world to do?
- How does the coming and work of Jesus on the cross change how we understand this passage? (specifically for Old Testament)

For reading Acts, you main want to also ask:

- How does the church continue Jesus' mission?
- Is this section descriptive of the church or prescriptive for the church?

A Apply: After trying to wrap our heads around the meaning of the passage, we want to seek to apply it to our lives. The goal of reading the Bible is transformation. We want to let the Word of God grow deep in us so that we can bear much fruit.

A helpful way to think about application is to ask questions about how it transforms our head (knowledge and beliefs), our heart (desires and attitudes), and our hands (actions and practices).

- Head: How does this passage challenge or confirm your beliefs?
- Heart: How does this passage challenge your desires and attitudes? Is there something you need to change?
- Hands: What does this passage tell us to go and do with our energy, time, and resources?
- Is there any response to this passage you feel that the Spirit is impressing upon you?

PRAYER: Finish your time in God's Word by using this passage as the subject of your prayer. Take time to thank God for what was learned and express your desire for His continued work of transformation in your life.

More helps (including videos) at southshores.org/soma

SERMON NOTES

WEEK 01 | April 11, 2021

BIG IDEA

NOTES

RESPONSE

- S Soak**
Read the passage slowly asking the Holy Spirit to open it to you. What from its surroundings or style is important?
- O Observe**
Take note of what is there. What is going on? What seems significant? Do you have any questions you'd like to ask the author?
- M Meaning**
Think through why this is in the Bible. What is the author trying to say? What is the main point of the passage? How is the church continuing Jesus' mission?
- A Apply**
The goal is transformation. How will the meaning of this passage transform your head (knowledge/beliefs), heart (desires/attitudes), and hands (actions/habits)?

DAY 1

Luke 24:1-34

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Finish your time in prayer.

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Finish your time in prayer.

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Finish your time in prayer.

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Finish your time in prayer.

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Finish your time in prayer.

Group Discussion

WEEK 01

STORIES OF GOD

Have one member of your group share a story of God's work in their life. This could be a testimony of how they came to faith, or another point in their life when God changed them in some way. If your group has done this recently, then take a few minutes to read about the life of a person from church history. (see p. 50)

INTRO QUESTION

What are some of the most significant events in human history? What resulted from those events? What is their impact today?

OPEN SHARING (use these questions to look back at your O, M & As of your devotions)

How did God get your attention this week in your devotional reading?

Was there any specific way you wanted to apply your reading into your life?

FINAL QUESTIONS

What's Jesus' plan for His disciples?

Our passages this week remind us of the power of God who can deliver His people from sin and of the continuing mission the church has to proclaim that message of rescue. Who can you be praying for over the next 10-12 weeks that God would give you the opportunity to share with them and that they would be open to receiving this good news of Jesus?

PRAYER

Share names, and pray for them.

Notes/Prayers

WEEK 01

SERMON NOTES

WEEK 02 | April 18, 2021

BIG IDEA

NOTES

RESPONSE

- S Soak**
Read the passage slowly asking the Holy Spirit to open it to you. What from its surroundings or style is important?
- O Observe**
Take note of what is there. What is going on? What seems significant? Do you have any questions you'd like to ask the author?
- M Meaning**
Think through why this is in the Bible. What is the author trying to say? What is the main point of the passage? How is the church continuing Jesus' mission?
- A Apply**
The goal is transformation. How will the meaning of this passage transform your head (knowledge/beliefs), heart (desires/attitudes), and hands (actions/habits)?

DAY 1

Acts 2:1-21

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Finish your time in prayer.

S**O****M****A**

Finish your time in prayer.

S**O****M****A**

Finish your time in prayer.

S**O****M****A**

Finish your time in prayer.

S**O****M****A**

Finish your time in prayer.

Group Discussion

WEEK 02

STORIES OF GOD

Start with a story of God's power to transform (personal or historical).

INTRO QUESTION

What's the most forceful wind you've ever been in? What did it do?

What's your experience with the Holy Spirit? Where have you felt His guidance or power?

OPEN SHARING

How did God get your attention this week in your devotional reading?

Was there any specific way you wanted to apply your reading into your life?

FINAL QUESTIONS

What do you expect of the Holy Spirit? What should you expect?

How will you partner with the Holy Spirit to be a witness? What does that look like in practice and mindset?

PRAYER

Ask Holy Spirit to guide you. Spend time listening. Ask Him to make you a witness of Jesus.

Notes/Prayers

WEEK 02

SERMON NOTES

WEEK 03 | April 25, 2021

BIG IDEA

NOTES

RESPONSE

- S Soak**
Read the passage slowly asking the Holy Spirit to open it to you. What from its surroundings or style is important?
- O Observe**
Take note of what is there. What is going on? What seems significant? Do you have any questions you'd like to ask the author?
- M Meaning**
Think through why this is in the Bible. What is the author trying to say? What is the main point of the passage? How is the church continuing Jesus' mission?
- A Apply**
The goal is transformation. How will the meaning of this passage transform your head (knowledge/beliefs), heart (desires/attitudes), and hands (actions/habits)?

DAY 1

Acts 3:1-10

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Finish your time in prayer.

S**O****M****A**

Finish your time in prayer.

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Finish your time in prayer.

S**O****M****A**

Finish your time in prayer.

S**O****M****A**

Finish your time in prayer.

Group Discussion

WEEK 03

STORIES OF GOD

Start with a story of God's power to transform (personal or historical).

INTRO QUESTION

What's one of the most disappointing movie sequels you've seen? Why was it disappointing?

OPEN SHARING

How did God get your attention this week in your devotional reading?

Was there any specific way you wanted to apply your reading into your life?

FINAL QUESTIONS

How was healing a part of Jesus' mission? What was its purpose in the larger plan?

The disciples were able to heal just like Jesus did. Why was this important for them at this stage in the church's development?

Do we need to be able to heal someone in order to join Jesus in His plan?

Why or why not?

PRAYER

Pray for increased confidence in God to bring us into His mission at work in the world -- to heal souls through the spread of the good news of Jesus.

Notes/Prayers

WEEK 03

Prayer & Fasting Experience

INTRODUCTION

Prayer and fasting have long been part of the Christian experience. Yet, in recent times we have oriented our lives and even our religious experience around comfort. Fasting helps us to say no to our desires and yes to God. To voluntarily take part in fasting is to train our hearts to yearn for what God has said is important. It is to wean ourselves off of surface pleasures and dive deep for the joy of God. The goal of this experience is to introduce (for some) or remind (for others) the satisfaction of encountering God in this way.

“It is written, “‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” -- Matthew 4:4

Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. -- John 4:34

INSTRUCTIONS

Set aside a day this week when you would be able to fast (1, 2 or 3 meals, up to you). During that time, pick a 1 hour block (possibly when you would normally be eating) and use the instructions below and the scriptures on the facing page to guide your time of prayer. Take time to allow God to speak by His Word and by his Spirit as you devote this time to Him.

*You may also choose another way to fast: social media, technology or something else, pick something that comforts you or takes your attention.

Divine Reading (Lectio Divina)

1. **Read:** Don't dive into the temptation to simply glance over these passages, some of which may be very familiar to you. Take time to read them and in turn allow them to read you. You may find it helpful to read each passage a few times pausing each time before reading and asking God to speak the truth of each word to your heart.

2. **Reflect:** After reading allow time and space to reflect or ponder in your heart what you have just read. Allow God's Word to become His Word to you and illuminate the deep truth of the text by the Holy Spirit.

3. **Pray:** After you've read and reflected on the passage move on to prayer. Through your spoken and written word and dedicate the truth of His Word to Him in your heart.

4. **Contemplate:** Then contemplate on the truth of what has been revealed through His Word. God speaks... take time, listen, wait, and rest in the reality of His presence and the fullness of His love.

Matthew 5:1-12

2 Peter 1:3-11

Revelation 1:12-18

SERMON NOTES

WEEK 04 | May 2, 2021

BIG IDEA

NOTES

RESPONSE

- S Soak**
Read the passage slowly asking the Holy Spirit to open it to you. What from its surroundings or style is important?
- O Observe**
Take note of what is there. What is going on? What seems significant? Do you have any questions you'd like to ask the author?
- M Meaning**
Think through why this is in the Bible. What is the author trying to say? What is the main point of the passage? How is the church continuing Jesus' mission?
- A Apply**
The goal is transformation. How will the meaning of this passage transform your head (knowledge/beliefs), heart (desires/attitudes), and hands (actions/habits)?

DAY 1

Acts 4:1-22

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Finish your time in prayer.

S**O****M****A**

Finish your time in prayer.

S**O****M****A**

Finish your time in prayer.

S**O****M****A**

Finish your time in prayer.

S**O****M****A**

Finish your time in prayer.

Group Discussion

WEEK 04

STORIES OF GOD

Start with a story of God's power to transform (personal or historical).

INTRO QUESTION

How would you define "boldness"? What do you picture?

OPEN SHARING

How did God get your attention this week in your devotional reading?

Was there any specific way you wanted to apply your reading into your life?

FINAL QUESTIONS

How do these scriptures encourage you to be bold for Jesus?

What can encourage you to stand up for God before people? What role does the Holy Spirit have in this?

How does the quote below challenge you?

There is a false boldness for Christ that only comes from pride. A man may rashly expose himself to the world's dislike and even deliberately provoke its displeasure, and yet do so out of pride... True boldness for Christ transcends all; it is indifferent to the displeasure of either friends or foes. Boldness enables Christians to forsake all rather than Christ, and to prefer to offend all rather than to offend Him. – Jonathan Edwards

PRAYER

Ask God for the opportunity to speak His truth in boldness with words given by the Holy Spirit

Notes/Prayers

WEEK 04

SERMON NOTES

WEEK 05 | May 9, 2021

BIG IDEA

NOTES

RESPONSE

- S Soak**
Read the passage slowly asking the Holy Spirit to open it to you. What from its surroundings or style is important?
- O Observe**
Take note of what is there. What is going on? What seems significant? Do you have any questions you'd like to ask the author?
- M Meaning**
Think through why this is in the Bible. What is the author trying to say? What is the main point of the passage? How is the church continuing Jesus' mission?
- A Apply**
The goal is transformation. How will the meaning of this passage transform your head (knowledge/beliefs), heart (desires/attitudes), and hands (actions/habits)?

DAY 1

Acts 4:32-37

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Finish your time in prayer.

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Finish your time in prayer.

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Finish your time in prayer.

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Finish your time in prayer.

S**O****M****A**

Finish your time in prayer.

Group Discussion

WEEK 05

STORIES OF GOD

Start with a story of God's power to transform (personal or historical).

INTRO QUESTION

Who do you know that lives a life of generosity?

What do you think is the relationship between generosity and contentment?

OPEN SHARING

How did God get your attention this week in your devotional reading?

Was there any specific way you wanted to apply your reading into your life?

FINAL QUESTIONS

What inspired generosity in the early church? What inspires generosity in you?

When are you tempted to withhold generosity?

How has the desire to be rich affected you?

How can we encourage each other to prioritize storing up "heavenly treasures"?

PRAYER

Pray God would soften your heart and open your hand in trust and generosity.

Notes/Prayers

WEEK 05

Generosity Experiment

Generosity is about more than writing checks and is bigger than our bank accounts. It's an open handed, open hearted, faith-filled life that rests in God's abundance and seeks to share His abundance with others. This week we want to challenge you to undergo an experiment that will hopefully open your eyes, hear, and hands to more opportunities for generosity and the grace God gives through it.

STEP 1: IDENTIFY A NEED

Prayerfully think through the paths on which God has placed you (community, neighborhood, workplace, school, church, clubs, etc.) and the needs that people in those areas could have.

STEP 2: MAKE IT PERSONAL

Don't be content to leave the need at a general level (homelessness, widows, etc.), take it to a personal level - a specific person or family that you can assist. You should be able to write down a name:

STEP 3: GET CREATIVE

For the purpose of this experiment, the goal is not to simply hand out money, but find a creative, relational way to bless them. Whether it be time, attention, gifts, goods, or service, explore what would be most meaningful to them.

STEP 4: DO IT!

Don't leave it in the idea stage, make it happen! As you do, be open to what God wants to teach you about yourself, about generosity, and about this person you are seeking to bless.

STEP 5: REFLECT

We'd encourage you to take a little time to write down some of your experience and what God taught you through the process. (see next page)

BIG IDEA

NOTES

RESPONSE

- S Soak**
Read the passage slowly asking the Holy Spirit to open it to you. What from its surroundings or style is important?
- O Observe**
Take note of what is there. What is going on? What seems significant? Do you have any questions you'd like to ask the author?
- M Meaning**
Think through why this is in the Bible. What is the author trying to say? What is the main point of the passage? How is the church continuing Jesus' mission?
- A Apply**
The goal is transformation. How will the meaning of this passage transform your head (knowledge/beliefs), heart (desires/attitudes), and hands (actions/habits)?

DAY 1

Acts 5:17-32

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Finish your time in prayer.

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Finish your time in prayer.

S**O****M****A**

Finish your time in prayer.

S**O****M****A**

Finish your time in prayer.

S**O****M****A**

Finish your time in prayer.

Group Discussion

WEEK 06

STORIES OF GOD

Start with a story of God's power to transform (personal or historical).

INTRO QUESTION

What kind of suffering scares you?

What costs for Christianity could prove to be too much?

OPEN SHARING

How did God get your attention this week in your devotional reading?

Was there any specific way you wanted to apply your reading into your life?

FINAL QUESTIONS

Why do you think we tend to associate the suffering of Christians with a failure on God's part? How should we understand it?

If new legislation made it impossible for you to continue to your work while affirming Biblical principles, how would that affect your faith? How can you prepare yourself now to be ready to stand for God then?

Do you think the government, media, or popular opinion can stamp out the church in this country? How can we prepare ourselves (children, friends) to be the kind of people who continue to join Jesus in His mission no matter what?

PRAYER

Pray for the persecuted church across the globe. (see next pages)

Notes/Prayers

WEEK 06

WHAT IS THE WORLD WATCH LIST?

The World Watch List is an annual report on the global persecution of Christians ranking the top 50 countries where Christians are persecuted for Their faith. Released at the beginning of each year, the list uses data from Open Doors field workers and external experts to quantify and analyze persecution worldwide.

HOW ARE THE COUNTRIES RANKED?

Countries are ranked by the severity of persecution of Christians, calculated by analyzing the level of violent persecution plus the pressure experienced in five spheres of life.

**VISIT
OPENDOORSUSA.ORG
FOR MORE INFO AND
WAYS YOU CAN HELP
THE PERSECUTED
CHURCH**



- | | |
|---------------|-----------------|
| 1 North Korea | 11 Iraq |
| 2 Afghanistan | 12 Syria |
| 3 Somalia | 13 Sudan |
| 4 Libya | 14 Saudi Arabia |
| 5 Pakistan | 15 Maldives |
| 6 Eritrea | 16 Egypt |
| 7 Yemen | 17 China |
| 8 Iran | 18 Myanmar |
| 9 Nigeria | 19 Vietnam |
| 10 India | 20 Mauritania |



WORLD WATCH LIST 2021

VERY HIGH PERSECUTION

- | | | | | | |
|----|--------------|----|--------------------------|----|------------|
| 21 | Uzbekistan | 31 | Bangladesh | 41 | Kazakhstan |
| 22 | Laos | 32 | Burkina Faso | 42 | Cameroon |
| 23 | Turkmenistan | 33 | Tajikistan | 43 | Bhutan |
| 24 | Algeria | 34 | Nepal | 44 | Oman |
| 25 | Turkey | 35 | Central African Republic | 45 | Mozambique |
| 26 | Tunisia | 36 | Ethiopia | 46 | Malaysia |
| 27 | Morocco | 37 | Mexico | 47 | Indonesia |
| 28 | Mali | 38 | Jordan | 48 | Kuwait |
| 29 | Qatar | 39 | Brunei | 49 | Kenya |
| 30 | Colombia | 40 | Dem. Rep. of the Congo | 50 | Comoros |

HISTORICAL STORIES OF TRANSFORMATION & FAITH

FROM THE CHURCH

Rarely do we think of the faithful builders and martyrs of church history, those who gave their work and even their lives in witness to the faith. Take courage from the people listed below. Research their stories to share in your groups or simply study them on your own.

EARLY CHURCH AGE

Polycarp - AD 69-155 | Witness in the Arena

A disciple of the Apostle John, Polycarp was a Christian bishop of Smyrna. Polycarp is recorded as saying on the day of his death: “Eighty and six years I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King and Savior? You threaten me with a fire that burns for a season, and after a little while is quenched; but you are ignorant of the fire of everlasting punishment that is prepared for the wicked.” Polycarp was burned at the stake and pierced with a spear for refusing to burn incense to the Roman Emperor. On his farewell, he said: “I bless you, Father, for judging me worthy of this hour, so that in the company of the martyrs I may share the cup of Christ.”

Athanasius - AD 296-373 | Defender of Christ’s Deity

A theologian and bishop of Alexandria. He was the chief defender of Trinitarianism against the Arian heresy. In AD 325, at the age of 27, Athanasius began his leading role against the Arians during the First Council of Nicaea. Over the course of his ministry, he was exiled five times by Constantine and other Emperors and popes. Yet, his defense of the Trinity and specifically Christ’s deity led him to be called “a pillar of the church” and the “Father of Orthodoxy” by those that followed him.

Patrick - AD 389-461 | Missionary to the Irish

At the age of 16 Patrick was captured by Irish pirates from his home in Britain and taken as a slave to Ireland. He lived there for six years before escaping and returning to his family (through divine providence). Following some years of training, Patrick vowed to return to Ireland to witness and minister to those who had once captured him. Patrick brought the gospel to the Irish, planting churches and Christian communities along the way. He faced great obstacles and abuse throughout as he ministered among them for 40 years. Near the end of his life, when asked if all the hardships had been worth it, Patrick answered, “The greatest gift in my life has been to know and love God; to serve Him is my highest joy.”

MIDDLE AGES

Boniface - AD 680-754 | Missionary to the Germans

Boniface boldly proclaimed Christ in the unreached region of Germania. One of his famous deeds was challenging the local people's belief in their gods, by starting to chop down a large oak tree that they revered as the place for worship. As he began to chop it a great wind finished the job. The people expected Boniface to get hit by lightning, but when their gods did not defend their own tree, they decided they would list to Boniface about his God. Boniface later built a chapel using the wood of that oak tree. When writing back to his home in England he said, "Let us give our lives for the Word of God. Let us not be hirelings who flee from the wolf but faithful shepherds, watchful for the flock of Christ."

Elizabeth of Hungary - AD 1207-1231 | Servant of the Poor

Daughter of a king and the wife of a Duke, 19 year old Duchess Elizabeth responded to a famine in the land. She threw her energy into relieving the suffering of her people. She emptied the royal treasury, depleted the granaries, used the castle's kitchen staff, coordinated with churches and monasteries across the land, and she even served her people with her own hands. After her husband's death, she was kicked out of the castle to live in poverty herself. Though her kingly father begged her to return to his home to possess her kingdom and her inheritance. She replied, "I hope indeed that I already possess my Father's inheritance -- that is to say, the eternal mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ." She died at the age of 24.

John Wycliffe - AD 1330-1384 | Morning Star of the Reformation

Philosopher, theologian, professor at Oxford, but Wycliffe's name is best connected with Bible translation. John was condemned by Pope Gregor XI declaring him a heretic for saying that the pope and all church leaders should be subject to the Word of God. He advised them to give up seeking their own pleasures, live a life of humble service, and above all he advocated that Scripture was for everyone. He and his followers labored for eleven years translating the Bible into English, believing "if the people of England will read the Scriptures for themselves it will be the surest road for them to follow Christ and come to heaven."

FOR FURTHER READING

- *Trial and Triumph: Stories from Church History* by Richard Hannula (Great with kids)
- *Eerdman's Handbook to the History of Christianity* by Tim Dowley
- *The New Foxe's Book of Martyrs* by John Foxe
- *Sketches in Church History* by S.M. Houghton
- *History of the Christian Church* by Philip Schaff

Don't Forget


*Pick up Part II at South Shores Church
as our UNSTOPPABLE GOD series
continues...*

Questions?

Email Pastor Derick at dzeulner@southshores.org

"But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop them; you will only find yourselves fighting against God."

ACTS 5:39



**IF IT
IS FROM
GOD,
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BE ABLE
TO STOP
THEM** ACTS 5:39



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