

*90 Day Challenge II: The Acts of the Holy Spirit*  
*By the Spirit We Are Conspicuous*  
Acts 2:41-Acts 3

We are journeying one chapter at a time through the epic adventure of the early church called Acts. One blue card said, "This feels slow. I want to read ahead and see what happens." Well, there are worse things than reading ahead in the Bible. But they're right; it is slower than our last 90 Day Challenge... on purpose. You can read the Bible like a dog eats—devour it, wolf it down—and that has its place. But sometime it's good to read the Bible like a cow eats: chew, digest it, bring it back up, chew on it some more... digest some more. That is what we are doing with Acts. So how many of you have done some part of the 90 Day Challenge? How many of you did all five days in this journal?

Last week we talked about how believers are "filled with the Holy Spirit." Even when we have the Holy Spirit as Christians—*[blow up balloon]* you cannot be a Christian if you do not have the Holy Spirit—you always need more of the Holy Spirit. *[blow balloon up more]* Why? Because we leak! Through sin and lust and doubt and busyness and laziness and stinginess... we leak. I challenged you to pray this prayer every morning for a month: "Fill me up, Holy Spirit!" How many of you joined me in this prayer?

One man in his twenties—who is young in his Christian faith and just started coming here—took me up on the challenge. He told his friends he prayed that morning in the shower to be filled with the Holy Spirit—and then, get this—later that day at work, he told his friend that he was filled with the Holy Spirit! Isn't that awesome?

That's what happens! When we invite the Holy Spirit to fill us we can't help but let Him out! *[let loose of balloon]* We are unleashed upon the world, and the world can't help but notice. We can't help but be conspicuous... just like our story this morning. I pick it up where we left off last week near the end of Acts 2. The Holy Spirit has come upon the apostles and Peter is preaching the sermon of his life. He concludes:

<sup>37</sup>When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" <sup>38</sup>Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup>The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom

the Lord our God will call.”<sup>40</sup>With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”<sup>41</sup>Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

<sup>42</sup>They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.<sup>43</sup>Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.<sup>44</sup>All the believers were together and had everything in common.<sup>45</sup>Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.<sup>46</sup>Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,<sup>47</sup>praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

*<sup>1</sup>One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. <sup>2</sup>Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. <sup>3</sup>When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. <sup>4</sup>Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” <sup>5</sup>So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. <sup>6</sup>Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” <sup>7</sup>Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. <sup>8</sup>He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.*

*<sup>9</sup>When all the people saw him walking and praising God, <sup>10</sup>they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. <sup>11</sup>While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon’s Colonnade.*

I want to remind you that one of the goals of this 90 Day Challenge is to see how the disciples took the teachings of Jesus and put them to use. Each Tuesday we look back at a parallel passage where Jesus teaches on our theme. This week’s parallel took us to Matthew 5, the Sermon on the Mount.

*<sup>13</sup>“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. <sup>14</sup>“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup>Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.*

*<sup>16</sup>In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*

The Spirit-filled life is a conspicuous life. It cannot help but be. It doesn't try to be conspicuous; it just is. Every morning I eat a hard-boiled egg. If I eat it without salt it just isn't the same. A little sprinkle makes all the difference. It is conspicuous. We have a basement that is dark as a tomb. In fact, one night my mom fell down those stairs and hurt herself. So Cyndi strung lights down the stairs. They are very conspicuous... and have made all the difference in the world.

Jesus said his Spirit-filled followers would be conspicuous. Not in order to bring attention to themselves, rather, they are to live shiny, salty, conspicuous lives so that, when men and women see them, their attention and praise are drawn to God.

Isn't that exactly what we see in this morning's story? Peter and John are on their way to the temple to pray. They walk past one of the invisible people—one of the countless beggars who were so commonplace, they became like cultural white noise. This man had been lame from birth and was carried daily to his favorite begging spot. When Peter and John walked by, he called out to them for money. Notice the eyes in the story: *<sup>4</sup>Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" <sup>5</sup>So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.*

The first step in being God's conspicuous witnesses is to really see what we might have grown blind to. The man is "looking for" money, but Peter and John give him so much more. Peter pronounces healing in the name of "Jesus Christ of Nazareth" and a man who never walked rises to his feet. Wow! And it only gets crazier. This guy is like a new colt trying out his spindly legs for the first time. Listen to the "action" words!

*<sup>8</sup>He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. <sup>9</sup>When all the people saw him walking and praising God, <sup>10</sup>they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging...*

How is it that Peter saw a man normally invisible to him? How is it that he was inspired to do something that, if it didn't work, would be very embarrassing? How is it that this man was healed and went galloping around the temple to the amazement of onlookers? This is the power of the Spirit-filled believer. We expect the Spirit to direct us. We pay attention when He does. We obey even when it is frightening or seems impossible. And in those moments of obedience, God does amazing, conspicuous things.

Salt. Light. Conspicuous. When was the last time people pointed with amazement at something the Holy Spirit had done through you—and were drawn closer to God because of it? Spirit-filled believers are conspicuous. But notice this—and this is

important—the Holy Spirit-filled believers were already becoming conspicuous before Peter and John walked to the temple that day. By the way they were living.

*<sup>42</sup>They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.... <sup>44</sup>All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup>Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. <sup>46</sup>Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup>praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.*

First, notice they were together. Three times Luke uses the word: "All the believers were together... every day they continued to meet together... they broke bread in their homes and ate together." They were together for fun and fellowship, together for meals, together in each other's homes, together in worship.

If we put this one early church principle into practice, it would be incredibly conspicuous, because our culture does not know how to be together... especially in the Northwest. We don't really want to be together. We like isolation; we like our fences. We like homes set back into the woods or behind gates. Think about it... how much togetherness do we share as a congregation? We come for worship, but most of us blast out the doors as soon as it is over. We have a LifeGroup during the week, but as far as actually hanging out with each other—living life together—how much do we really do?

This has been the single biggest growth point in my life. Cyndi and I realized we were living in isolation; we kind of hid in our house with our bridge that crosses our creek. Pull up the drawbridge at night and hide. We knew God was calling us to be more relational—to open our doors and add leaves to our dining room table and fill empty chairs. We've never been more intentionally relational: reaching out, sharing meals... This is a work of the Holy Spirit in us and in me, and it is very conspicuous because our culture does not really know how to do life together. Yet people long for genuine intimacy. Imagine if no visitor could get out of here on a Sunday morning without three invites to lunch. No way, right? In the South, maybe! But that was the early Church!

Another thing conspicuous about their life together was their generosity. They "...had everything in common. They sold all their possession and goods and gave to anyone as he had need." Now, the Bible does not teach that we must sell everything to be followers of Christ, but it does teach that real Christians are conspicuously generous. Can the same be said of you? Are you known as a giver or a grasper? I am occasionally aware of those who give and those who don't, and it is often disheartening. I cannot fathom how those blessed by the fellowship, care, teaching and nurture of this congregation—whose children are taught in Sunday School, whose teens are brought to Christ, whose marriages are saved, whose spiritual lives are deepened—I cannot fathom how such people can be so stingy. I'm sure of this: the last place the Holy Spirit is invited is into someone's checkbook,

and often, it is the one place from which He is barred. That is not Christian. True Christians are conspicuously generous.

They were also conspicuous worshipers. Again, they weren't doing it to be seen. But when you are at the temple every day—when you are in constant prayer, when you are living life with glad hearts and praising God with all you do and in all you face—when you make worship a priority in a culture that plays on Sunday, the world notices!

In the spectacular (signs and wonders and miracles) and in the mundane (meals, fellowship, generosity) the Holy Spirit-filled Church was conspicuous. They were salt and light. They stood out and brought glory to God. Are we conspicuous as a church? Are you as an individual? I hear people say, "I don't talk about my faith; I live it." Well we don't have permission to remain mute when the Spirit wants to light our tongues on fire. I'm quite certain that unless we live conspicuously Christian lives that are consistent with what we say we believe, whatever words we do speak will fall dead to the ground the minute they leave our lips.

So what was the response to these conspicuous, Holy Spirit-filled people? Well, we read that they "found favor with all the people." In fact, people came "running" toward them in the Temple Courts. It is certainly more pleasant when living conspicuous Christian lives is received with favor, but it isn't always so, is it? Five chapters from now, we will read these words: "On that day a great persecution broke out against the church of Jerusalem..." Why? Because they were model citizens, because they demonstrated community and were generous and worshipful and did miracles? No, because they did these things in the name of Jesus... because they loved and lived and gave and worshiped in the name of Jesus, their idolatrous culture came to hate them.

We have in our possession an ancient document called *The Letter to Diognetus*. It was written as early as 130 AD... only one generation after Acts 3. In a time when idolatry, abortion, promiscuity and religious persecution were rampant, it is a description of the conspicuous way that Christ-followers continued to live their lives. "They marry, as do all others; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed... They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death, and restored to life. They are poor, yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things, and yet abound in all; they are dishonored, and yet in their very dishonor are glorified. They are reviled, and bless; they are insulted, and repay the insult with honor; they do good, yet are punished as evil-doers. When punished, they rejoice as if quickened into life..."

One hundred years after Pentecost, Christians were described as those who lived conspicuously different lives in the name of Jesus and were sometimes persecuted for it. Is it any less true today? One of the reasons many of us would rather just live

good Christian lives without actually mentioning Jesus is this: the name of Jesus still divides and disturbs. In a culture that trips over itself trying not to offend anyone, it is still open season on Christians. So, fair warning: if you live conspicuous Holy-Spirit filled lives, society will be drawn to you. Like the beggar who held on to Peter and John, there is a deep longing for genuine, loving, generous, selfless community. Gig Harbor is starved for it, but if you dare to mention that you live conspicuously because the Spirit of Jesus lives in you, you might pay a price for it.

So be it! We do not live conspicuously in order to curry favor or impress people. We live conspicuously, because when we are filled with the Holy Spirit—truly filled with the Holy Spirit—we can do no other. We can't help ourselves! It is what we do. My question to each of us this day would be simply this: are you conspicuous in your love for Jesus Christ? Do those around you have any clue that you are a follower of Jesus... any inkling that you are filled with His living, breathing, empowering Holy Spirit? If not, then you probably aren't! And perhaps this would be the day when you surrender your reputation, your appearance, your double-mindedness to the Lord and say, "Fill me now to overflowing so that all who see me will see the love of Christ and give glory to the Father."