

The Story Adult Study Guide

For the Week of April 26, 2020

Chapter 28: “New Beginnings”



Key Events: Jesus’ ascension, the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the ministries of the apostles, Stephen is martyred, the conversion of Saul (Paul)

Key Characters: Peter, Stephen, Barnabas, Paul (see pages 492-493 for descriptions)

Bible Reference for this Chapter: Acts 1-10, 12

1. In the video introduction, Randy Frazee said, “They (Christ’s disciples) are not called so much to do witnessing as they’re called to be witnesses.” What’s the difference?
2. On Pentecost, Peter boldly preached before a large audience in public. (pages 391-392) Just 50 days earlier, Peter denied Jesus and cowered in fear and shame. What factors accounted for this change?
3. In Peter’s Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:14-41), he quoted from the Old Testament. Compare and contrast the main ideas of God’s Word in the Old Testament with the main ideas of the New Testament.
4. “The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.” (page 397) How can the pain and humiliation of persecution be something that brings joy? What spiritual benefits result from persecution?
5. Saul (Paul) went from arresting disciples to helping people become disciples. (pages 399-401) What does this say about God and his Word, and our Christian witness?
6. What message about Christ’s kingdom did God relay to Peter in the episode with Cornelius? (pages 401-403) Apply this message to Christians and congregations today.
7. What did you learn about the relationship between the Holy Spirit and believers from this chapter of *The Story*?

Prayer Suggestions

- Pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit, that I trust in the Lord more and more and I’m compelled to serve him and be his witness.
- Ask for courage to stand up for Jesus in the face of the world’s opposition and persecution.

The NIV Bible translation was used in this lesson.

Study Guide Helps

1. Both references reflect Christ's commission to make disciples through Word and sacrament. "To do witnessing" emphasizes what we say to others - the truth of Jesus and God's Word. "To be witnesses" emphasizes an outpouring of our faith and love for God involving every part of our Christian life. We share the Good News in our words AND actions; our lifestyle is a witness for the Lord. People see Jesus by the way we live in the home, church, workplace, community, leisure activities – any and all affairs of our life. We are witnesses in every way we give glory to God.
2. Peter is the epitome of the sinner/saint. Like all sinners, he struggled with arrogance, conceit, spiritual weakness, and fear. When he relied on himself, he fell flat on his face. The Holy Spirit brought him to repentance and turned him to the Savior for forgiveness. Then the Spirit empowered Peter with wisdom and courage to be the servant-messenger. Peter's dramatic change was entirely the doing of the Holy Spirit building him up in his faith and life. The Lord taught him to place his hope and reliance totally on God, a necessary trait for the apostolic work he began to do on Pentecost.
3. Comparisons: The main ideas of the Old and New Testament are similar in that the central figure is Jesus Christ, the Messiah who came to earth to redeem sinful mankind. Both the OT and NT preach law and gospel, and both stress repentance and faithfulness to God who loves and forgives. Contrasts: The OT pointed ahead to the coming Savior, and the NT fulfilled God's OT promise. OT people were saved through faith in the promise of the coming Messiah, and people of the NT era were/are saved through faith in the Savior who came to live, die and rise again. To keep OT believers on track regarding their sin and need for a Savior, God regulated their lifestyle with a ceremonial/sacrificial system of worship. The OT system ended with Jesus' death and resurrection, and the NT emphasizes that every aspect of Christian life is *a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your ... proper worship* (Romans 12:1). The OT looked forward to the first coming of Christ; the NT looks forward to Christ's second coming on the Judgment Day.
4. When a believer stands up for the truth of God, an obvious separation will occur between the believer and his faith convictions and unbelievers and their convictions. This is what causes Christians to be alienated, criticized, and persecuted by the world, and earthly hardship and suffering will result. The suffering itself won't bring joy. There is a Spirit-instilled honor that comes with standing up for God, and that brings joy (not honor in a self or vain-glorious manner). *Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.* (Romans 8:17) God uses persecutions to test our faith, to draw us closer to him and his Word, to strengthen our resolve and commitment to his mission, and to bolster our spiritual courage. Abiding by God's will, persecution validates the Word of God we hold to and share. Persecution unites Christians together in faith and love, and leads to the spread of the gospel (as it did in the early Christian church).
5. The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 1:16: *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the **power of God** that brings salvation to everyone who believes.* The fact that God transformed Saul is a testimony to the power of the gospel and the Holy Spirit. It reinforces the truth that when it comes to overcoming rejection and creating saving faith, *with man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.* (Mark 10:27) It is a reminder that we should never discount the work of God through our Christian witness to others. We should never consider a lost soul to be a lost cause. *So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.* (Isaiah 55:11)
6. Old Testament ceremonial law declared the animals in Peter's vision to be unclean. By practice, Jews did not associate with Gentiles and did not enter their homes. These laws and practices were ingrained into the psyche and lifestyles of Jews, and it would be hard for them to change. God sent a clear message to Peter stating that these laws and practices were no longer in effect and no longer binding, that there were no distinctions between Jews and Gentiles, and that the good news of salvation is intended for all people. *"Everything is permissible" – but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible" – but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.* (1 Corinthians 10:23-24) Christians and congregations today may be reluctant to view people who are different from them as worthy of their ministry efforts. Pray that God leads us to overcome our prejudices and share the good news to all, including those from a foreign and pagan background.
7. The events of the early Christian church affirm the power of the Holy Spirit and the essential nature of the Spirit's work in faith conversion and in every aspect of ministry and Christian living. The book of Acts chronicles a number of effects brought about by the Holy Spirit, including spiritual gifts, courageous witnessing, the transformation of unbelieving hearts to saving faith, knowledge and understanding about salvation in Jesus, godly wisdom, love and care for others, boldness in the face of opposition, and joy, peace and hope in Christ. Believers then and now have the Holy Spirit to go and love, serve and proclaim the Gospel to make disciples.