

Empowered by the Holy Spirit

Summary and Goal

In the previous session we saw the importance of the Holy Spirit being given to us, particularly how He enables us to worship the triune God and live out the gospel. In this session we will examine further implications of the Holy Spirit's power in us. With the Holy Spirit living in us, we are able to love God and others rightly and intentionally. Our love for God should push us into the world as we share the good news that Christ died for sinners and that salvation is available to those who repent of their sins and confess Jesus as Lord.

Session Outline

1. God's people have something better to offer the world (Acts 3:1-7).
2. God's people give glory and praise to Jesus (Acts 3:11-16).
3. God's people call others to repentance so they can experience refreshing (Acts 3:17-20).

Background Passage: Acts 3:1–4:31

Session in a Sentence

Peter and John offered a man who was lame something better than money—healing and salvation in Jesus.

Christ Connection

Once the Holy Spirit was given, the disciples began boldly proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit displayed the power of God's kingdom through the miracles the disciples performed in Jesus' name for His glory and praise.

Missional Application

Because we have experienced the miracle of our salvation from sin and new life in Jesus, we follow the example of the early Christians as we boldly and graciously proclaim the gospel and minister to those in need.

Group Time

GROUP MEMBER CONTENT

Introduction

EXPLAIN: Use the paragraph on page 20 in the Daily Discipleship Guide (DDG) to illustrate the difference the right kind of resource makes when trying to perform a certain job.

A man was hired to work the overnight shift for a parcel company. In the early morning hours, he unloaded 18-wheelers full of packages. The location where he trained was outfitted with electric belts that would send the packages out of the trailer and up to the next belt to be sorted. Little did he realize how helpful that electric belt was. After training, he was transferred to his permanent location that was not outfitted with electric belts. Instead, he and his fellow workers had to haul the boxes out of the trailer by hand before passing them off to be sorted. Many days he longed to be back at the state-of-the-art training warehouse, where electric belts made the work so much easier.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



When was a time you didn't realize how helpful something was until it was gone? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

SAY: While the Holy Spirit never leaves us, we often forget the Holy Spirit's power in our lives and try to carry the weight of the Christian life and the call to evangelism by ourselves. But God knows we're inadequate not only to save ourselves but also to carry on His mission in our neighborhoods and to the ends of the earth. That's why He gives us the Holy Spirit when we trust in Jesus.

SUMMARIZE: In the previous session we saw the importance of the Holy Spirit being given to us, particularly how He enables us to worship the triune God and live out the gospel. In this session we will examine further implications of the Holy Spirit's power in us. With the Holy Spirit living in us, we are able to love God and others rightly and intentionally. Our love for God should push us into the world as we share the good news that Christ died for sinners and that salvation is available to those who repent of their sins and confess Jesus as Lord.

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Point 1: God's people have something better to offer the world (Acts 3:1-7).

READ Acts 3:1-7 (DDG p. 21).

¹ Now Peter and John were going up to the temple for the time of prayer at three in the afternoon.

² A man who was lame from birth was being carried there. He was placed each day at the temple gate called Beautiful, so that he could beg from those entering the temple. ³ When he saw Peter and John about to enter the temple, he asked for money. ⁴ Peter, along with John, looked straight at him and said, "Look at us." ⁵ So he turned to them, expecting to get something from them. ⁶ But Peter said, "I don't have silver or gold, but what I do have, I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!" ⁷ Then, taking him by the right hand he raised him up, and at once his feet and ankles became strong.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 21) to help your group members put themselves in the position of the man who was healed.

Imagine being this man, unable to walk from birth and forced to beg for money from those who walked by. Would you wonder if God were punishing you? Would you have any hope of improving your circumstances? Day after day, you would expect ridicule and pity and hope only for someone's generosity with silver and gold. But Peter and John encountered the man with something far better to give—healing in Jesus' name.

- The man who had been lame got up and entered the temple with Peter and John and began "walking, leaping, and praising God" (vv. 8-9). Through the actions of two men who faithfully followed Jesus, God was exalted. No doubt this man took seriously the name of Jesus and coupled his physical healing with a spiritual healing in having his sins forgiven through repentance and faith in the name of Jesus.

SAY: We are all tempted to read this account and put ourselves in the place of Peter and John, wishing we could perform miracles. That has its place. But first we should see ourselves as the lame man in need of healing but without hope. In our sinful state, our condition compares well to his lameness. But like him, through faith in Jesus, we too should get up, get going, and get to praising God for our salvation in Christ.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



What are some ways the condition of the man who was lame compares with our sinful state apart from Jesus? (in sin, we are beggars with nothing to make us worthy of God's attention; our sinful state cannot be changed through any power of our own; we are hopeless in our sinful condition; we're dependent upon someone faithfully bringing the gospel to us)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 21) to comment on how the Holy Spirit’s presence in believers’ lives empowers them to minister to the world in Jesus’ name, even if not healing the lame. Ultimately, we minister to the world in Jesus’ name by sharing His gospel with the world, as Peter and John went on to do.

Now put yourself in the shoes of Peter and John and be encouraged by the power of Jesus working through His disciples. We probably should not expect to walk around town healing people, but we have other Spirit-empowered ways to minister to the world. And just like Peter and John, we are all called to minister to the world in the name of Jesus, watching Him do amazing things through us as we share His gospel with the world.



Voices from Church History

“The Spirit-filled life is not a special, deluxe edition of Christianity. It is part and parcel of the total plan of God for His people.”¹

—A. W. Tozer (1897-1963)

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- Jesus told His disciples that they would do greater things than even He did once the Holy Spirit came to them, and He meant it (John 14:12-14). This is one of many examples in the Book of Acts of Jesus’ ministry multiplied in the lives of His disciples. The multiplication of Jesus’ ministry extends to and includes all those who believe in Jesus.
 - God is still doing miraculous things in the world today, chiefly through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus. If we don’t see the miraculous results of sinners coming to faith every time we share the gospel, we are prone to be discouraged. But we must remember that we aren’t in the results business—we’re in the faithfulness business. The Holy Spirit lives inside of us as believers to keep pushing us forward in obedience even when it feels hard and fruitless.
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INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



Why should we consider the gospel of Jesus a better gift than silver and gold, or even a healing? (the gospel is the means by which we are saved for eternity; silver and gold and healing from physical ailments are temporary blessings limited to the scope of this world; the gospel puts silver, gold, and physical ailments into eternal perspective; silver and gold are treasures of this world that can be stolen, lost, misused, or generate pride)

Point 2: God's people give glory and praise to Jesus (Acts 3:11-16).

READ: Ask a volunteer to read Acts 3:11-16 (DDG p. 22).

¹¹ While he was holding on to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astonished, ran toward them in what is called Solomon's Colonnade. ¹² When Peter saw this, he addressed the people: "Fellow Israelites, why are you amazed at this? Why do you stare at us, as though we had made him walk by our own power or godliness?" ¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our ancestors, has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and denied before Pilate, though he had decided to release him. ¹⁴ You denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer released to you. ¹⁵ You killed the source of life, whom God raised from the dead; we are witnesses of this. ¹⁶ By faith in his name, his name has made this man strong, whom you see and know. So the faith that comes through Jesus has given him this perfect health in front of all of you.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 22) to emphasize that Peter and John made it clear that they performed miracles under Jesus' authority, not in their own power.

Peter and John were clear with the man who was lame that his healing came in Jesus' name. Here they made the same point with the gathering crowd. The disciples did not see themselves as special but as vessels through whom God was working. They had no power of their own but called upon the name of Jesus to heal a man, and the result was a powerful display of Jesus' authority on earth. Through faith in this Jesus, the man was healed. So Peter and John's point is clear—give glory to Jesus!

- When we share the gospel of Jesus, when we serve our neighbors in Jesus' name, when we see years of prayers in Jesus' name answered, we don't take the credit for the results—we should exalt the name of Jesus. Follow Peter and John's lead by deflecting any kind of credit; instead, glorify the only One whose name has the power to save (Acts 4:12-14). We are advancing *His* gospel and *His* kingdom, not our own.

PACK ITEM 4: POINT TO JESUS: Read the **John Cassian quote** on this poster and then ask group members the following question.



Why might we find it so difficult to give glory to Jesus for the works He accomplishes in our lives and through us? (we struggle with pride and want the attention for ourselves; it feels awkward to praise Jesus around other people who don't know Him; people will look at us as strange and ridicule us; we mistakenly attribute our successes to our own strength and power; we lack faith and aren't asking for Jesus' help in the first place; we don't remember who Jesus is or all that He has done for us)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 22) to explain that who Jesus is and what He has done for us should lead us to praise His name and work in His power to accomplish His mission.

God is not trying to make your life harder, more confusing, or more stressful. He didn't send Jesus, the Holy Spirit, or send you on His mission to add a burden to your life. Jesus is called the "source of life" (Acts 3:15) and the "Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6) for a reason. The burden we already have in our lives comes from sinning against God and rejecting His Son. This guilt shackles us and keeps us from being the human beings we were created to be. But Jesus came to set us free to be truly human as He is. So don't reject or deny Him; rather, have faith in His name, be healed from your sin, and praise Him.

- If you have come to Jesus in faith, then Jesus has set you free to be truly human (John 8:31-36)—someone whose life is joyfully submitted to Him and His mission. Christ's perfect obedience and His sending of the Holy Spirit have given you the power and freedom to live out your salvation and share it with others.
 - Whereas we might be paralyzed by sin or the future consequences of our choices, Christ has taken this burden off of us. He obeyed perfectly; He undid everything Adam did (Matt. 4:1-11; Rom. 5-6). He stared down Satan and won. His very presence makes the demons have fits (Mark 5:1-20). When we call on Jesus' name, we know that through the Holy Spirit we are empowered to do things that aren't humanly possible. This doesn't mean we can dunk a basketball in the name of Jesus if we're 5 feet, 2 inches, but it does mean that God works through us to advance His mission in ways we can't control, foresee, or imagine.
 - This doesn't mean the Christian life and mission are easy. God is opposed to earning, not effort. He doesn't want us to try to buy our salvation with good deeds, but He does expect us to take up our cross and follow Jesus (Matt. 16:24). The Christian life is hard. It takes work, dedication, discipline, and sacrifice—just as it did for Jesus who did pay the price for our salvation. He was denied, ridiculed, and killed on a cross by sinners, but He was also raised from the dead, exalted, and glorified by God, and now His followers praise Him for their salvation and His work in and through them.
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FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 22).

It's **Christ** whose name we bear.

It's His **mission** we are called to join.

All **glory** to Him for our salvation and for the salvation of others!

Point 3: God's people call others to repentance so they can experience refreshing (Acts 3:17-20).

READ Acts 3:17-20 (DDG p. 23).

¹⁷ “And now, brothers and sisters, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your leaders also did. ¹⁸ In this way God fulfilled what he had predicted through all the prophets—that his Messiah would suffer. ¹⁹ Therefore repent and turn back, so that your sins may be wiped out, ²⁰ that seasons of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send Jesus, who has been appointed for you as the Messiah.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 23) to highlight the people's need to repent even though they acted in ignorance.

The Jewish people in the temple, and their leaders, were guilty of the heinous, cosmic crime of putting the Son of God to death. Graciously, Peter categorized them as having acted in ignorance, but this did not let them off the hook. If they truly had understood God and His Word, they would have accepted and worshiped Jesus. Instead, they executed Him in unbelief. Therefore, they needed to repent to find forgiveness of sin—as do we all.

- Jesus seemed to aim His sharpest critiques at the Jewish leaders, such as the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees (ex. Matt. 23). Why was that? As a Jewish man Himself, Jesus spoke more strongly toward these leaders than others because they were supposed to be the best theologians. They knew the Hebrew Scriptures—the very Scriptures that testified about Jesus (John 5:39). Thus, they should've known, based on His life and ministry, that He was the promised Messiah. But instead, they tried to debate Jesus and trip Him up. They wanted to discredit and denounce Him. And when they thought they had no other option, they put Him to death and used the Romans to do it.
- Still, from the cross Jesus prayed for His enemies to be forgiven because they didn't know what they were doing in crucifying Him (Luke 23:34). As an answer to that prayer, Peter held out the offer of forgiveness to the Jews if they would repent and turn to Jesus, the risen Savior, in faith.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



Why is ignorance not a valid excuse for sin? (by nature, being made in God's image, we know at least something of right and wrong; ignorance may be the result of willfulness, the refusal to put in the time and work to know if something is permissible or not; acting in ignorance denies the existence of God in favor of personal autonomy and authority)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 23) to explain how a faulty theology led the Jews to kill the Son of God. But lift up the grace of Jesus to grant forgiveness, rest, and *refreshment* in His presence to those who repent and believe in Him.

The Jews had a faulty theology that led to faulty, guilty actions. A biblical theology helps us know God rightly so we can worship Him rightly and then tell others about Him rightly. But the people of this crowd had not recognized the Son of God in the flesh standing before them. And misunderstanding the plan of God and the person of His Son, they justified a rigged trial and an unjust killing. Yet through repentance and faith, this same Son would forgive, be with His followers through the Holy Spirit, give them rest and *refreshment*, and one day come for them again as their promised Messiah.

- A biblical theology is about love—love of God and love of neighbor, not a love for mere knowledge that puffs up and inflates the ego (1 Cor. 8:1). If we know God rightly, we will love Him as Father, Son, and Spirit. If we love our neighbors, we will share the gospel of Jesus with them that they too may repent, believe, know God rightly through Jesus, and love Him. As God’s people empowered by the Spirit to know Him and speak rightly about Him, we are equipped to call others to repentance and faith, pointing them to the true source of refreshment—Jesus—rather than self or the temptations of this world.
 - *Refreshment* comes from being in the presence of the Lord by grace through faith. Jesus said that He would give His followers rest (Matt. 11:28-30). He comforts, encourages, and builds up His people that they would be refreshed and renewed for the life of faith and the gospel mission. Through Christ and through the Spirit, God has come down to us and He is close to us that we may be refreshed in Him. We look for contentment, joy, and meaning in so many wrong places when it is only Jesus who provides these.
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FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 23).

God Is Immanent: God is personable and **relatable** to those made in His **image**, while remaining completely distinct and unique from all of His creation. God is not a distant deity (as imagined by the deist) who only sits on His heavenly throne with no interaction, but instead, He is a personal God who created people in His image to be in personal **relationship** with Him.

Essential Doctrine “God Is Immanent”: When we say that God is immanent, we mean that God is personable and **relatable** to those made in His **image**, while remaining completely distinct and unique from all of His creation. It means that God is not a distant deity (as imagined by the deist) who only sits on His heavenly throne with no interaction, but instead, He is a personal God who created people in His image to be in personal **relationship** with Him.

My Mission

EXPLAIN: The Holy Spirit enables us to fulfill the Great Commission—to proclaim Christ and make disciples—and in turn the greatest commandments—to love God and love neighbor. The healing of the man who was lame demonstrated how God’s mission for the church entails both. Peter and John showed love for God by their willingness to teach and heal in Jesus’ name; they also showed love for neighbor by their willingness to heal this man who was disabled and impoverished. We may not perform miraculous healings, but we always should seek opportunities to serve our neighbor and announce to them Jesus, who died for sinners and was raised. Those who repent of their sins and confess Him as Lord receive salvation, forgiveness of sin, and refreshment. The Messiah has come, so let’s invite others to join us in the seasons of refreshing that are to come.

READ the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 24), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

Because we have experienced the miracle of our salvation from sin and new life in Jesus, we follow the example of the early Christians as we boldly and graciously proclaim the gospel and minister to those in need.

- **What steps will you take to focus your life on obeying and giving glory to Jesus Christ?**
- **In what ways can your group give what you have of resources and the gospel to those in need in your community?**
- **What opportunities are being laid before you by the Holy Spirit to present the gospel and point people to Jesus?**



Voices from Church History

“When we pray for the Spirit’s help ... we will simply fall down at the Lord’s feet in our weakness. There we will find the victory and power that comes from His love.”²

—Andrew Murray (1828-1917)

CLOSE IN PRAYER: Father, You have come close to us not only in Your Son, who dwelt among us, but also by Your Spirit, who dwells within us. Thank You for the salvation and new life given to us through the Holy Spirit. Help us to trust the Spirit’s leading and equipping to make Jesus known to others in meek yet powerful ways as we call them to repentance and faith. Amen.

INSTRUCT: As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the **Daily Study** devotions in their DDG (pp. 25-27), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use **Encourage One Another** (p. 28) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.

Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage your group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The **Daily Study** devotions in the DDG (pp. 25-27) will help group members get into God's Word and study it for themselves. **Encourage One Another** (p. 28) will help group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 25-27) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.
- Share the following idea from the devotion for **Day 2** as a part of point 2 in the session: **Peter and John show us that we need God Himself to work through us. Our salvation is initiated by the Father sending the Son, the Son dying and resurrecting, and the Spirit indwelling us.**



Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God's Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- **Day 1:** "We aren't guaranteed physical healing in this life. God may grant it, but our suffering is also never wasted."
- **Day 5:** "We are not the rulers of this world—not yet (Rev. 5). Rather, we are exiles and sojourners on our way home (1 Pet. 2:11)."



Visit www.GospelProject.com/Blog for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God's Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the group member's DDG (p. 28) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using *The Gospel Project* in their groups.

- **Encourage group members to think constructively about ways to show non-Christians that salvation in Jesus is superior to what the world offers them.**
- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.

Additional Commentary

Point 1: God's people have something better to offer the world (Acts 3:1-7).

“The healing of the crippled beggar offered confirmation of the truth of the gospel that the apostles were preaching. It is thus not surprising that it generated opposition from the religious authorities. Luke has chosen to tell the story of one of the lowest of the have-nots in that society, a man who was unable to work for a living and could only beg for money from people like Peter and John, who were coming to worship at the temple (3:1-2). When Peter and John were confronted by this beggar, they had no money to give him, but Peter did give him a unique gift: immediate healing in the name of Jesus (3:3-7). As Peter will explain in 4:12, there is no other name that can save. This truth applies equally to beggars and to the respected leaders of the Sanhedrin.”³

“These men who received power from God never used that power as if it were their own but referred the power to him from whom they received it; for the power itself could never have any force except through the name of him who gave it. And so both the apostles and all the servants of God never did anything in their own name but in the name and invocation of Christ. For the power itself derived its force from the same source as its origin, and it could not be given through the instrumentality of the ministers, unless it had come from the Author.”⁴

Point 2: God's people give glory and praise to Jesus (Acts 3:11-16).

“The power of Jesus Christ creates such amazement that it requires an explanation. This mirrors Jesus' own pattern, as he often followed miraculous healings with periods of teaching on the nature of the kingdom of God. The miracles in Scripture should be seen not so much as models that we should seek to repeat but as evidences of divine authority for God's special messengers. As people marvel at the power of the apostles, Peter immediately renounces praise and redirects their gaze to Jesus Christ: everything is about Jesus, whom God has glorified (v. 13) by raising him from the dead. Peter insists that this miraculous healing is the work of the same God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob whom his fellow Jews were on their way to worship. Even though they have failed to honor God's Messiah and are filled with sin that deserves judgment, God nevertheless continues to call them back to rest in him. Jesus is 'the Holy and Righteous One' (v. 14). In Isaiah 53:11 the 'servant' of the Lord, a messianic title, is called the 'righteous one,' and this is picked up later in Acts as well (cf. Acts 7:52; 22:14). Jesus is also the 'Author of life' (3:15), and yet his own people have rejected him and killed him.”⁵

“The speech has two movements. (1) The first part is the ‘defense’ or ‘judicial’ portion (vv. 12-18). Within this first part is the historical core about what took place before the healing that made it possible. God exalted the one who was crucified, the one by whose power this miracle took place (vv. 12-15). Next comes the explicit declaration that Jesus’s name, that is, the authority of his person, is the source of the healing (v. 16). Finally, there is the observation that their acting in ignorance was still a part of God’s plan that the Christ would suffer (vv. 17-18). (2) The ‘deliberative’ portion of the speech makes the application. It asks for response from the crowd as they deliberate over the facts (vv. 19-26). Here the appeal is to respond with repentance and a turning to the offer of forgiveness. This response can permit ‘the times of refreshing’ to come, along with the rest of God’s promise in Jesus’s return (vv. 20-21). The call to turn and the explanation that heaven holds Jesus until the time for completion arrives (vv. 19-21) also contain a warning: failure to respond leaves them culpable before God, for they risk failing to heed the prophet like Moses (vv. 22-23). These events are what the prophets proclaimed in the promise to Abraham’s seed. That promise means that blessing can come to those who turn (vv. 24-26).”⁶

Point 3: God’s people call others to repentance so they can experience refreshing (Acts 3:17-20).

“All they had to do to avail themselves of this salvation was to change their former attitude to Jesus and bring it into line with God’s attitude. God had clearly declared his verdict by raising him from the dead. Let them therefore repent, let them repudiate with abhorrence their acquiescence in the murder of their true Messiah, let them turn back in heart to God, and the salvation and blessing procured by their Messiah’s death would be theirs. Their sins would be blotted out, even that sin of sins which they had unwittingly committed in consenting to the death of the Author of life. Here is the heart of the gospel of grace. Not only would their sins be blotted out; those times of refreshment and joy which the prophets had described as features of the new age would be sent to them by God.”⁷

References

1. A. W. Tozer, *How to Be Filled with the Holy Spirit*, in *Life in the Spirit* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 24.
2. Andrew Murray, in *Andrew Murray On Prayer* (Whitaker House, 1998) [eBook].
3. Paul Mumo Kisau, “Acts of the Apostles,” in *Africa Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 1331.
4. John Cassian, *On the Incarnation of the Lord Against Nestorius* 7:19, in *Ancient Faith Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2019), 1341, n. 3:6.
5. Justin S. Holcomb, “Acts,” in *Gospel Transformation Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 1456, n. 3:11-26.
6. Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, in *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2014), 165 [Wordsearch].
7. F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010) [Wordsearch].