



Living Outside the Box

Experience God
without Boundaries

Join Us On the Journey

Small Group Study Guide

Introduction

And the Walls Come A Tumblin' Down

It's easy to get out of a cardboard box. Just pop the lid and climb out. It's harder to see the invisible walls that hem us in every day. Assumptions, barriers, fears, conflict and rejection – we run into these so often we almost don't see them. Yet God never intended us to be boxed up. Nor does He want His people to stay shut up inside the box of a church building. Here are four tools to help you knock down the four walls of whatever box you find yourself in. *Living Outside the Box* could be the most powerful spiritual experience of your life if you take advantage of all four:

Love God Weekly in Worship

The messages for the next 8 weeks will uncover the incredible story of the Church as it broke every barrier in the book of Acts.

Sunday	Verses	Living Outside...
Week 1	Acts 1:1-11	Assumptions
Week 2	Acts 2:1-47	Barriers
Week 3	Acts 4:1-31	Fears
Week 4	Acts 4:32-5:16	Materialism
Week 5	Acts 6:1-7	Conflict
Week 6	Acts 8:1b-8	Rejection
Week 7	Leave the Building	
Week 8	Acts 9:1-31	Yourself
Week 9	Acts 10:1-48	For Good

Grow in Grace with Daily Readings from Acts

There are 50 devotional messages. Read, pray and take an action step each day.

Grow in Grace Weekly with Bible Study

Gather with one of our Bible study groups and use the Study Guide.

Share with Others by Inviting Friends and Blessing the Community

On week 7 (or a different Sunday if it works better for your congregation) is your day for **“The Church Has Left the Building”** On that day, instead of “going to church” for a worship service we will “Be the Church” and serve in the community. Sign up - either individually, as a family or with your friends – for one of the many projects we've arranged. This is more than our church's project. We encourage you to work your network of friends and invite them to worship, your Growth Group and to the mission project you choose on the day we leave the building.

Let's lift the lid and get started!

How Do I Live Outside the Box?

How to Use this Study Guide

To live outside of the box we need each other. You cannot climb out and live free in Christ without other Christians. To be sure, worship and personal Bible study are essential. But the greatest growth in Christ occurs in community. That's why, when the Holy Spirit gave birth to the Church He set on fire a small group of believers. Today, the same Spirit wants to ignite your faith and launch you and your Bible Study out of the box and into the world. Over the next eight weeks, the Spirit will use the book of Acts to teach us how to live outside assumptions, barriers, fears, materialism, conflict, rejection, self-centeredness and the temptation to crawl back into the box. Each session will include three sections:

Love God – If we want out of the box we have to go UP – right to God's throne room through worship and prayer. Each study begins and ends with a time of soaking in His presence and lifting up our prayers. Get your group into the habit of spending more time in prayer and worship than just a brief opening and closing.

Grow in Grace – Here we will uncover truths from the book of Acts. As you discuss these questions, try to forget all your assumptions about church and imagine you are part of this newborn movement which has no building, no denomination, no seminary trained pastors and no New Testament.

Share with Others – Here's where you take your first steps out of the box. Bible study is not about information but transformation ... and that takes action. What will you do with what you learn each week? Use this time to plan how your group will participate, either individually or together on the Sunday when we leave the building.

As an experiment in Living Outside the Box we strongly encourage every Bible study to hold their meetings not at the church building or in members' homes but out in a public place – such as a coffee shop, a restaurant, the public library, etc... It will dramatically change the way you study and even create curiosity from those who pass by.

This study guide is meant to be your servant, not your master. So please don't feel you have to race through the session; the point is to take your time to let God lift you out of whatever box you are in. It's not necessary to "go around the circle" before you move on to the next question. Your group will enjoy deeper, more open sharing and discussion if people don't feel pressured to speak up. You don't need to ask every question but it is important to cover at least something in each section.

Ready? Let's Pop the Top and Start Climbing Out!

Week 1: Living Outside Assumptions Read Acts 1:1-11

Love God – Ask the Spirit to open our eyes and minds to barriers which prevent us from living for Jesus 24/7.

Grow in Grace

1. Share a time when you made an assumption about a person or situation that turned out to be not what you expected.
2. Acts 1:1-3 What do you think it was like to spend 40 days with Jesus *after* the resurrection? What final lessons do you think He gave them before He ascended?
3. Acts 1:4-5 Why was it important for the disciples to wait in Jerusalem? Why do you think Jesus described the gift of the Holy Spirit as a baptism? What difference did the Holy Spirit make in the lives of the first believers? What difference does the Holy Spirit make in your life?
4. Acts 1:6-8 What assumption did the disciples make about Jesus' mission? How did Jesus change their focus 180 degrees? What mission did He give them? How will the Holy Spirit empower them to fulfill this mission?
5. We often speak of "church" as a building. We "go to church." Yet the church is not a destination but a movement. It's not a building but a people who live their faith 24/7. How are our assumptions like the disciples who expected the world to come to their kingdom, while Jesus wanted to send them out into the world?
6. What assumptions prevent you from living and sharing your faith in Jesus wherever you go? Examples: 'No one is interested.' 'They will be offended.' 'We shouldn't talk about religion.'

Share with Others

1. "The Church Has Left the Building" all ages are invited to participate in one of several mission projects to bless the community around us. Since this is only a month away please choose your project **today**
2. The first step to living outside the box is breaking through false or exaggerated assumptions which hold us back. What assumptions do we have about our community? What assumptions do non-believers have about Christians? What are practical ways we can take down these walls? How can the Holy Spirit help?
3. Church is not a place we go or an event we attend. It is a lifestyle we live. What are some steps we can take to start "being the Church" by going out and blessing our community?

Love God – Instead of asking God to bless you, pray for the Spirit to help you bless what He is doing in our community.

Week 2: Living Outside Barriers

Read Acts 2:1-47

Love God – As the group prays today, ask the Holy Spirit to come down upon you and open your hearts and minds to the reality of His love and power.

Grow in Grace

1. Have you ever been in a place or circumstance where you didn't understand the language? How did it make you feel?
2. Acts 2:2-4 Why do you think the Spirit came with wind and tongues of fire? What do you think the Apostles thought? Why is it significant that the Apostles "began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them"? What happens when the Spirit enters a room? When He enters the hearts of men and women?
3. Acts 2:5-12 How did the Apostles' diverse languages impact the crowd? What is the initial reaction of some onlookers (Acts 2:6-7, 13). How would you react if you were there? How did the Spirit use these languages to overcome barriers and divisions in the crowd?
4. Acts 2:14 Are you surprised that Peter stood up, "raised his voice and addressed the crowd"? Why or why not? Is there a correlation between the Peter of courage standing by Jesus in the Garden, the Peter of fear alone and denying Jesus, and his newly acquired boldness on Pentecost?
5. Acts 2:37-38 What moved some of the crowd from their initial confusion and amazement to "being cut to the heart"? What does it mean to be "cut to the heart"? What was Peter's answer to the people's question, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Can you share a time when you read or heard the Gospel and it cut you to the heart? What did you do? How did it change you?
6. Acts 2:42-47 is a model or template for the Church. What actions did the Holy Spirit inspire in the early church? What were the fruits of these actions? Which of these actions do we do today? Which actions is the Spirit asking us to add?

Share with Others

1. Has your group selected a mission project? Are there any practical details which need to be discussed? Please mention who you will invite from outside our church to serve with you on that day. Include these names in your closing prayer.
2. We've seen how the Holy Spirit first transformed Peter and the Apostles, then worked through them to inspire a change of heart in the early believers. What barriers do we need to remove or breakdown in our own church to experience more of the power of the Spirit?
3. How can we practically rely upon the Holy Spirit to share the Good News with our words and actions in our homes, work and community?

Love God – Ask the Spirit to remove specific barriers which prevent you, your group and our church from receiving His power.

Week 3: Living Outside Fears

Read Acts 4:1-31

Love God – Take some time in prayer and allow everyone to lift up concerns, issues or worries they are facing today or tomorrow.

Grow in Grace

1. In Acts 4:1-3; Peter and John are arrested for speaking about Jesus.
 - a. Why would they risk so much to spread the Gospel?
 - b. How far would you go to share the message of Christ's love and sacrifice?
2. Situation – You're lost and your GPS is broken. You stop in a gas station to get directions to a friend's house. A well-dressed man tells you to go to the 2nd light and make a right. After he walks away, a 2nd man, shabbily dressed with a 2 day growth of beard, tells you the correct way is to make a left at the 2nd light.
 - a. If nobody else can help you with directions, whose advice would you take?
 - b. Why were the rulers so astonished by the courage of Peter and John because they were "unschooled, ordinary men"?
 - c. How can we get beyond looks to realize the value of a person?
3. In verses 14-17, the leaders admit to the miracle they have seen, can't deny it, yet want to stop the spread of the power of Jesus.
 - a. Why would they wish to deny it?
 - b. Why do we struggle so with what we see in front of us?
4. After being released, Peter and John reject the command to stop teaching in the name of Jesus. Have you ever disobeyed somebody with authority, because you felt that what you were being told to do was wrong?
5. Have you ever felt the Holy Spirit guiding you to do or say something regarding your faith?

Share with Others – When Peter and John, and the other early followers of Christ, spoke of their beliefs they knew there was the possibility of arrest, physical harm and even death. We don't need to worry about such possibilities.

1. What fears do you have in sharing about your faith with family and friends?
2. What steps can you take to spread The Word to whomever you meet?
3. If your group meets out in the community in a café, restaurant or library, do a surprising kindness for a person who works there.

Challenge – Choose one of the following or be bold and do both in the next week.

1. Share with at least one person, outside of your church family, some way that your faith has helped you.
2. As you do random acts of kindness this next week (opening doors, helping others) follow the act with a blessing rather than a "your welcome" – God Bless, Christ loves you, etc...

Love God – Be bold and have your study group close in prayer by going in a circle and have each member pray. Have the last person in the group finish by asking the Spirit to give strength and courage to share the message of Christ in our community.

Week 4: Living Outside Materialism

Acts 4:32-5:11

Love God: As you open in prayer, ask God to reveal His heart to you and show you how He wants to transform yours.

Grow in Grace

1. Share a time when it was easy for you to be generous- giving with no strings attached. What made it easy? What were the results?
2. Acts 4:32-33 Describe the believers' relationship with each other. What was their focus/ mission? How did they view their material possessions? Verse 33 states that "much grace was upon them all". What does this mean? Think of someone you know whose life is marked by grace. How would you describe that person?
3. Acts 4:34-37 How did the early church care for its members? What prompted the giving of material possessions? What does it mean to "own" something? What rights and responsibilities are implied with this?
4. Acts 5:1-11 Why do you think Ananias and Sapphira kept some of the money from the sale? The Bible does not say Ananias and Sapphira were forced to sell their possessions. It does say they were in agreement in this situation. What do you see as the problem with Ananias and Sapphira's actions? Why does Peter say they lied to God, not men? What should Ananias and Sapphira have done?
5. When we make a promise and keep it, we are most like God. Why do we break our promises or lie? How do these lies affect our relationships with others and God?
6. Think about your life. What do you own? Do you truly own it? How generous are you with your possessions and your life? What causes you to hold back when it comes to sharing your possessions? What keeps you from surrendering your life to God?
7. All we have, including our lives are on loan from God. What do you feel God is calling you to give over to Him? What area of your life is God trying to transform? How can you cooperate?

Share with Others:

1. We serve a generous God and He desires us to be a generous people. In what ways does your group care for the needs of people within the church and the needs of people in the community? How can you do more of this? Take some time to develop a plan of action right now.
2. Is everyone in your group signed up for a mission project for "The Church Has Left the Building"? If not, please sign up today and invite a friend to join you.

Love God: Spend a few minutes in silent prayer to allow God to speak to your hearts. Confess to God whatever you have been holding back from Him. Ask Him to transform your heart to make it more like His and to show you what He is trying to do in your life. Close by praying for those in need within the church and in the community.

Week 5: Living Outside Conflict

Read Acts 6:1-7

Love God Spend time in prayer, ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with the “peace of God which transcends all understanding” (Philippians 4:7).

Grow in Grace

1. Share a time when you faced a conflict which led to a better outcome than you expected. How did this happen? What was your part in the resolution?
2. Acts 6:1 In the very beginning of the Christian community two groups emerged – Grecian (Greek-speaking) Jewish Christians and Hebraic (Aramaic-speaking) Jewish Christians. With so much in common, what could their differences have been? What “good” problem was the cause of their conflict?
3. Acts 6:2-4 What was the problem facing the two groups of Jewish Christians? What do you think of the Apostles when they say, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the Word of God in order to wait on tables”? Are they being arrogant, realistic or visionary? What do you think of their solution?
4. What characteristics did the Apostles say are required for the candidates? Why is it important that leaders of God’s people possess these qualities? Some disciples “wait on tables” while others preach the Word. Brainstorm all the reasons why it is essential for each disciple to find his or her calling in the Body of Christ.
5. Acts 6:5 The Apostles did not select the Seven. They let the Grecian Jews choose. How can we give away more of the ministry to the people? How can we improve collaboration between our ministries? Between churches? If you were alive at that time what do you think you would have been chosen to do?
6. Acts 6:7 “So the word of God spread” – List all the positive results that came from this conflict. Why do some conflicts split a congregation? How can God use differences or even conflicts to multiply the church?

Share with Others

1. By now, your growth group has chosen a mission project to participate in “The Church Has Left the Building”. How can you, as a follower of Christ, reflect the church as seen in Acts 6:1-7 in your present day mission project? How can you personally choose another “seven” for Christ?
2. “We don’t want another worship service. It will split the church!” “Our Bible study is crowded but we don’t want to start a new one.” Why do these well meaning sentiments actually prevent the church from growing?
3. How can you turn daily encounters into opportunities to bring God’s word to the people around you? What small step could you begin with?

Love God Ask the Holy Spirit to turn problems into opportunities for growth. Pray that He will speak through you to others so that you can bring new disciples to Christ.

Week 6: Living Outside Rejection

Read Acts 8:26-40

Love God – Open with prayer around your group. Encourage everyone to pray about someone in their life they could share the Good News with.

Grow in Grace

1. Have you ever experience rejection – from a loved one, employer, friend? How did you feel and what did you learn about yourself in the process?
2. Following the stoning of Stephen, the church was scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1-3). How did God use this wave of rejection and persecution to spread the Gospel?
3. Acts 8:26-29 What is notable about the instructions the angel of the Lord gives to Phillip? Discuss the significance of the Ethiopian man being an “important official.”
4. Why does Phillip’s conversation with the official depend upon him following the Spirit’s instructions to stay near the chariot? Has God ever set up an appointment for you to share the Gospel?
5. Acts 8:30-33 How did Phillip initiate a spiritual conversation with the official? How comfortable are you with striking up conversations with strangers? Have you ever had a spiritual conversation with a stranger? Do you feel confident you could explain God’s plan of salvation to someone?
6. Acts 8:36-40 Were you baptized as an infant or later in life? If you remember being baptized share your experience. What is significant about the Ethiopian official’s baptism? Why do you think the Holy Spirit whisked Phillip away?
7. Following the baptism how did the official’s life change? What are the implications for us when considering whether to share our faith with others, particularly those we don’t know?

Share with Others

1. What, if anything holds you back from sharing your faith? Fear of rejection, lack of knowledge, feeling unprepared? What are some practical ways to gain confidence?
2. Have you gone on a mission trip? Had the opportunity to lead someone to Christ? Share how the experience(s) impacted you.
3. This week, as a church, we will leave the building. What project did you choose to serve? Share your thoughts about the experience. How can your group continue serving God beyond the walls of our church on a regular basis?

Love God – Pray for God to reveal opportunities for you to be a blessing to others who may not know him.

Week 7: Living Outside Yourself

Read Acts 9:1-31

Love God – Read Psalm 139. Pray for the eyes of our hearts to be opened to see ourselves as God sees us. Optional, sing “Open the Eyes of My Heart”.

Grow in Grace

1. Have you ever known a “bully”? Did you have a run in with this person and how did you react?

Read Acts 9:1-9

2. How would Saul describe himself up to this point? How would the Jewish community describe him? How would the early Christian church describe him?
3. Have you or anyone you know had a dramatic conversion experience? If so, describe what it was like before and after the conversion.

Read Acts 9:10-19

4. Who is Ananias and how did he react to what God asked him to do? Why did he react this way?
5. Like Ananias, have you ever doubted something God asked you to do? What happened?

Read Acts 9:20-31

6. When Paul came to the synagogues, what were people expecting him to do? What did he do? What emotions did this invoke in the people?
7. What would you feel if a known terrorist walked into our church today? How would you react if he started preaching about Jesus Christ?

Share with Others

1. What did Saul change about himself to become Paul? What do you need to change to become all God wants you to be?
2. What ideas did Ananias have to change to obey God? What ideas about God do you have that prevent you from doing His will?
3. God does not want us to wait for people to join us in our building. Our mission is to go out and share the Good News about Jesus through our words and actions. What are three practical changes that will help you live outside the box?

Love God

Ask someone to pray the Holy Spirit will break down our preconceived ideas about ourselves, God and people outside the Christian faith that we may leave the walls of our church and share with them the Good News about Jesus.

Week 8: Living Outside for Good

Read Acts 10:1-48

Love God – Pray for God to open us completely to the Spirit's leading in our lives. Ask for the courage to see every person we encounter with the eyes of faith.

Grow in Grace

1. Share a time when you stepped out of your comfort zone into a country, a culture, a circumstance that was completely different from your own.
2. Acts 10:1-8 What did the angel tell Cornelius to do? What are some of the ways you can see proof that God is working in someone's heart? What is God's promise to those who seek him?
3. Acts 10:9-23: Describe Peter's vision. Why does it take three times? What does it mean? How does God change Peter's heart? Why is this such a pivotal moment for the Church? When it comes to sharing the Good News, do we think some people are "off limits"?
4. Acts 10:34-43: Using Peter's message to Cornelius, work out a simple outline of the Gospel message. What key points does Peter make? What is the promise in verse 43 and who is it for?
5. Acts 10:44-48: Why did the Holy Spirit come on the Gentiles before they were baptized? What was the sign they received the Holy Spirit? Why were the Jewish Christians "astonished"? Why is it still important for the Gentiles to be baptized?
6. What does this passage teach us about God's grace? What did God do to Peter to help him share the Gospel? How did this scene change the Church forever?

Share with Others

1. There is a great temptation to go back to keeping our faith in the box. Discuss how you can individually stay "Living Outside the Box" in the sharing of your faith. Discuss ideas of how your church can keep "Living Outside the Box"
2. God sent His Son because He loves the whole world. No one is beyond God's grace regardless of position or race. Are there perceptions you have that you need to ask God to change?
3. Split your group into groups of 2-3 and practice sharing one truth of the Gospel.

Love God

To signify Living Outside the Box, finish your study by going outside and standing in a circle on the lawn, sidewalk or front porch. Close in prayer and thank God that the Gospel is for all. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you in tangible ways to open yourself to opportunities to share His grace with all people.