
NOW & THEN

Lesson 5



The Work Jesus Began

Primary Scripture: Acts 1:1–8 (NLT)

Purpose of This Guide

This guide is designed to clarify your role in what God is doing now, and to call you into active participation in His work—not by your own effort, but through the power of the Holy Spirit.

1. The Problem We Experience

Many believers understand that God is at work, but remain uncertain about their role in it. We affirm that Jesus has accomplished salvation, that the Kingdom has begun, and that God is moving in the world. But we often live as observers rather than participants. Some assume that spiritual work belongs to pastors or leaders. Others feel unqualified or unsure where to begin. Still others try to act, but rely entirely on their own strength and become discouraged. The result is a disconnect between what we believe God is doing and how we actually live. Scripture does not support a passive role. It presents a clear expectation: what Jesus began, His people are now called to continue.

We believe:

- Jesus has accomplished the decisive work
- God is active in the world
- The Kingdom is advancing

And yet:

- We hesitate to engage
- We rely on our own ability
- We remain unsure of our role

The question is not whether God is working.

The question is whether we will join Him.

2. What Jesus Actually Began (Acts 1:1–3)

The book of Acts opens with a clear statement: it records what Jesus “began to do and teach.” This is a critical word—began. It means that Jesus’ earthly ministry was not the completion of His work, but the starting point of something that would continue. His life, death, and resurrection established the foundation, but His mission did not end when He ascended. Instead, it was entrusted to those who would follow Him. This reframes how we understand the Church. It is not an audience watching what Jesus did—it is a people continuing what He started. If this is true, then following Jesus is not only about belief, but about participation in His ongoing work.



Read: Acts 1:1–3

Key Truths:

- Jesus' work did not end—it began something ongoing
 - The mission of God continues beyond Jesus' earthly ministry
 - Followers of Jesus are part of what He is still doing
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Early Anchoring (Do Not Skip)

Before moving on, identify one specific area of your life where you know God is at work—but where you have not yet stepped in.

This may be:

- A person
- A conversation
- A situation
- A responsibility you have avoided

This will be your focus for this entire session.

3. What Our Role Is (Acts 1:4–5, 8)

Jesus does not leave His followers with a vague sense of purpose. He gives them a clear role: they are to be His witnesses. This means they are to represent Him, speak about Him, and live in a way that reflects Him. But before they are sent, they are told to wait. This is essential. The work they are called to do cannot be accomplished through their own ability. It requires the power of the Holy Spirit. However, Jesus does not only define the role—He defines the direction of that role. The mission moves outward, beyond comfort, familiarity, and preference. Participation in God's work is not just about doing something—it is about going where He sends, even when it stretches us.

Read: Acts 1:4–5, 8

The Pattern of the Mission

Jesus lays out a progression that is both geographic and personal:

Jerusalem

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The place where you are.
Your natural environment.
People like you.
Where faith is easiest to express.

Judea

The broader community.
Still familiar, but requiring intention.
People similar to you, but not as close.

Samaria

A place of tension.
People who are different.
People you might avoid, misunderstand, or feel uncomfortable with.

The Ends of the Earth

No boundaries.
No exclusions.
The call extends to anyone and everyone—especially those on the margins, overlooked, or pushed aside.

What This Means

The mission of God:

- Does not stay where it is comfortable
- Does not remain among people like us
- Does not avoid tension or difference
- Does not exclude anyone

If we are only engaging where it feels natural,
we are not yet participating in the full scope of what Jesus began.

Reflection

Looking at these four movements:

Where are you currently engaged?

Where are you avoiding?

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Jerusalem (comfortable):

Judea (intentional but familiar):

Samaria (uncomfortable or resistant):

Ends of the Earth (ignored or overlooked):

4. Why We Hesitate to Participate

There are consistent reasons people hold back from engaging in God's work. Some feel unprepared or inadequate. Others fear rejection or failure. Some assume that their role is small or insignificant. And many simply do not recognize where God is already at work around them. These responses are understandable—but they are not what Scripture calls us to. The early followers of Jesus were not chosen because they were the most capable. They were called because they were willing. What mattered was not their strength, but their dependence. Hesitation often comes from focusing on our limitations instead of God's power.

Read: Acts 1:6–7

Key Truths:

- Uncertainty about timing does not remove responsibility
 - Feeling unprepared does not disqualify you
 - The issue is not ability, but willingness to depend on God
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Reflection

What is currently holding you back from stepping into the situation you identified earlier?

5. Living Between Calling and Power

The Christian life is lived between a clear calling and a necessary dependence. We are called to participate in what God is doing, but we are not called to accomplish it on our own. This creates a tension: we must act, but we must not rely on



ourselves. Many people collapse this tension in one of two ways. They either withdraw and do nothing, or they act in their own strength and become overwhelmed. Scripture calls for something different: active participation that is rooted in dependence on the Holy Spirit. The work is real, the calling is clear, and the power is provided—but only if we rely on it.

NOW (Already True)

- Jesus has begun the work
- You are called to participate
- The Holy Spirit has been given
- The mission is active now

THEN (Not Yet Complete)

- The work is not finished
- You do not see full results
- You still feel inadequate at times
- The Kingdom is still unfolding

Reflection

Which are you relying on more—your own ability, or the power of the Holy Spirit?

6. Why the Holy Spirit Is Essential

The instruction to wait for the Holy Spirit is not optional—it is foundational. Without the Spirit, the disciples would have had the right message but no power to carry it forward. The same is true today. The work of God cannot be sustained by effort alone. It requires guidance, strength, boldness, and transformation that only the Spirit provides. Many people attempt to live out their faith through discipline alone, and while discipline matters, it is not sufficient. The Spirit is not an enhancement to the Christian life—He is essential to it. To participate in what God is doing, we must depend on the One who empowers it.

Reflection

Where do you need to shift from self-reliance to dependence on the Holy Spirit?



7. Formation Practice (This Week)

Practice: Step Into What God Is Doing

Return to the situation you identified at the beginning.

Each day this week, follow this pattern:

Step 1 — Revisit the Situation

Do not change it. Stay with the same focus all week.

Step 2 — Pray for the Spirit's Power

Ask specifically for:

- clarity
 - courage
 - guidance
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Step 3 — Take One Intentional Step

Do something concrete:

- initiate a conversation
- offer help
- speak truth
- respond in obedience

This must move beyond intention into action.

Step 4 — Reflect, Then Continue

At the end of each day, ask:

- Where did I rely on myself?



- Where did I depend on the Spirit?

Repeat daily.

Daily Prayer

Lord,
Do not let me remain a spectator.
Teach me to join what You are already doing.
Give me the courage to act,
and the humility to depend on Your Spirit.
Work through me—not by my strength,
but by Your power.
Amen.

8. Living It Out

Write the situation you identified:

Write the next step you need to take:

Write how you will rely on the Holy Spirit in that step:

Return to this daily.

Participation is not waiting until you feel ready.
It is stepping forward in dependence on God.

Final Note

Jesus did not finish the work—
He began it.

You are not called to watch it.



You are called to continue it.

And you are not sent to stay where it is comfortable.

You are sent outward—
to the familiar,
to the uncomfortable,
and to those who would otherwise be overlooked.

The same Spirit that empowered the beginning
is the Spirit who empowers you now.

