

Intro

ACTS IN ACTION: A Leadership Study Guide

“If We Do What They Did, We’ll Get What They Got”

THE FIRST CHURCH SUCCESS CODE

The promise is simple and bold: “If we do what they did, we’ll get what they got.” This book will help you understand what the early church did to receive the power of the Holy Spirit and what they achieved through that empowerment. By studying their methods, we can apply the same principles that led to their extraordinary success.

This study also incorporates key leadership principles from John Maxwell, using commentary from the Maxwell Leadership Bible alongside insights from his broader leadership library. Our hope is that this book will help you grow into the servant leader God has called you to be.

WHAT THEY GOT: THE RESULTS THAT CHANGED HISTORY

The outcomes recorded in Acts are staggering. In a single day, three thousand people believed and were baptized (Acts 2:41). Daily growth followed and never stopped (Acts 2:47). Ordinary people operated in supernatural power and boldness (Acts 4:13). The movement spread across the known world, reaching all the way to Rome (Acts 28:31). Churches were planted in every major city (Romans 15:19). The impact outlasted persecution and opposition, even scattering believers who preached wherever they went (Acts 8:4). The bottom line is that they started with 120 people in an upper room and, by God’s power, changed the world forever.

WHAT THEY DID: THE BLUEPRINT WE CAN FOLLOW

The early church’s success was not accidental. They followed specific principles that any church can apply today. They prepared thoroughly before launching publicly. They operated in supernatural power rather than human strength. They maintained unity while embracing cultural and social diversity. They faced opposition with courage and wisdom. They adapted their methods while keeping their message pure. They developed leaders at every level of the

organization. They multiplied disciples, not merely converts. And they planted churches rather than simply growing attendance in one place.

WHY JOHN MAXWELL?

John C. Maxwell is recognized globally as a foremost voice on leadership development. His insights help us understand how the early church leaders operated with such effectiveness and clarity.

Maxwell's contribution is extensive. He has spent more than forty years studying leadership principles and has sold more than thirty-one million books worldwide. His biblical commentary in the Maxwell Leadership Bible, paired with practical application from his broader work, offers a unique bridge between timeless truth and modern leadership practice. Maxwell often identifies principles others miss. Acts displays these principles in the most successful spiritual movement in history. Together, they provide both a biblical foundation and practical application. His approach helps us see that the early church's success followed proven leadership principles that still work. When we combine biblical truth with practical leadership wisdom, we position ourselves to experience similar results in our ministries.

THE ACTS ADVANTAGE

Why study the first church? They had no advantages we do not already have. There were no church buildings or facilities, no sound systems or technology, no marketing budgets or programs, no seminary-trained staff, no denominational support, and no government backing. Yet they had the results we desperately want: explosive, sustainable growth; supernatural demonstrations of power; unity across cultural and social barriers; impact that transformed entire communities; courage under extreme persecution; and leadership development at every level. The conclusion is inescapable. If they could do it with less, we can do it with more—if we follow their methods.

YOUR 11-WEEK JOURNEY

This study is designed for eleven weeks of learning and practice. Week 1 offers an introduction and overview. Week 2 explores Preparation and Launch (Acts 1–2). Week 3 examines Power and Opposition (Acts 3–5). Week 4 looks at Crisis and Growth (Acts 6–7). Week 5 focuses on Expansion and Conversion (Acts 8–9). Week 6 unpacks Breaking Barriers (Acts 10–12). Week 7 studies the First

Missionary Journey (Acts 13–15). Week 8 follows European Expansion (Acts 16–18). Week 9 highlights the Ephesian Ministry (Acts 19–21). Week 10 covers Trials and Testimony (Acts 22–26). Week 11 concludes with Rome and Beyond (Acts 27–28). Each week includes clear applications designed to help you “do what they did” in your context.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Each chapter includes what they faced—the challenges and opportunities of the moment; what they did—their specific methods and strategies; and what they got—the measurable results they achieved. You will also find Maxwell’s insights—leadership principles with book references—along with your weekly challenge—practical steps to apply their methods—and reflection questions for personal growth and group discussion.

THE ACTS LEADERSHIP DNA

Maxwell identifies five characteristics that made the early church leaders so effective. First, they were vision-driven. They knew exactly where they were going: “To the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Second, they were Spirit-empowered. They operated in supernatural power, not human ability (Acts 1:8; 2:4). Third, they were people-focused. They prioritized relationships and community over programs (Acts 2:42–47). Fourth, they were mission-minded. Everything they did served their primary purpose of making disciples (Acts 2:47). Fifth, they were multiplication-oriented. They developed leaders who developed other leaders, strengthening and expanding churches (Acts 14:21–23).

THE CORE PRINCIPLE

“If we do what they did, we’ll get what they got.” This is not about copying their exact methods; it is about applying their timeless principles in our modern context. The early church used first-century methods, but their principles were timeless. We must use twenty-first-century methods built on those same timeless principles. As Maxwell writes, “Leadership principles are timeless, but leadership methods must be timely” (Leadership 101, p. 45).

YOUR PREPARATION FOR THE JOURNEY

Before beginning Week 2, consider a few critical questions. What results do you want to see in your church or ministry, and what methods are you currently using to achieve those results? How open are you to changing your approach if needed? What would happen if your church grew like the early church grew? Are you prepared to do what they did to get what they got?

THE PROMISE AND THE CHALLENGE

The promise is that God's power has not diminished. His methods still work. If we follow the early church's blueprint, we can expect similar results. The challenge is that their methods required sacrifice, courage, and complete dependence on God. Are we willing to pay the same price for the same results? Maxwell reminds us, "Everything worthwhile is uphill" (The 15 Invaluable Laws of Growth, p. 89). The early church understood this. They climbed every hill, faced every challenge, and overcame every obstacle because they knew their mission was worth any sacrifice.

READY TO BEGIN?

The next ten weeks will challenge much of what you think you know about church growth, leadership, and ministry effectiveness. You will discover methods that seem too simple to work and principles that appear too demanding to follow. But remember: "If we do what they did, we'll get what they got." The question is not whether their methods work—the Book of Acts proves they do. The question is whether we are willing to apply them. Let's find out.

CHAPTER 2: POWER AND OPPOSITION

Acts 3–5 — "If We Handle Opposition Like They Did ..."

WHAT THEY FACED

The honeymoon was over. After the explosive success of Pentecost, reality hit. The religious establishment wasn't celebrating—they were scheming. The same leaders who crucified Jesus now turned their attention to His followers. New challenges emerged on every front. There was religious opposition from the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:1–22). There was internal deception through Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11). There was overwhelming growth that created logistical pressures (Acts 5:12–16). And there was escalating persecution, including

imprisonment (Acts 5:17–42). The test was simple and searching: Would they compromise their message to reduce opposition, or maintain boldness despite increasing pressure?

WHAT THEY DID: THE POWER–OPPOSITION CYCLE

PHASE 1: POWER DEMONSTRATION (Acts 3:1–26)

Peter and John were on their way to the temple for afternoon prayers—a routine activity that became extraordinary. At the gate sat a man lame from birth, more than forty years old, who asked for money to survive. Peter replied, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk” (v. 6). Instantly, the man was healed, “walking and jumping, and praising God” (v. 8). As Maxwell writes, “Leadership is not about having all the resources; it’s about using what you have effectively” (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, p. 156).

A crowd gathered in amazement, and Peter immediately seized the teachable moment, turning wonder into witness. He redirected attention away from himself and John—“Why do you stare at us as if by our own power we had made this man walk?” (v. 12)—and pointed them to Jesus: “The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob ... has glorified his servant Jesus” (v. 13). He then called for repentance: “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out” (v. 19). The principle is timeless. Great leaders do not take credit for God’s work; they use success to point people to the source.

PHASE 2: OPPOSITION RESPONSE (Acts 4:1–22)

The temple guard, Sadducees, and priests arrested Peter and John because they were teaching the people and proclaiming Jesus. Yet even in the midst of opposition, fruit remained. “Many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand” (v. 4).

Brought before the same Sanhedrin that condemned Jesus, Peter—filled with the Holy Spirit—delivered a clear and courageous defense. He answered directly: “If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness ...” (v. 9). He proclaimed Christ: “It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth ... that this man stands before you healed” (v. 10). And he made the truth exclusive and unmistakable: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved” (v. 12). Maxwell’s Law of Courage reminds us, “Courage is fear that has said its prayers” (The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader, p. 45).

The leaders faced a dilemma. They recognized that the apostles had been with Jesus (v. 13). They could not deny the miracle—the man stood there healed (v. 14). They could not stop the public momentum (v. 16). And they dared not punish the apostles without risking a riot (vv. 17–21). Peter and John’s response captured the heart of spiritual leadership: “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (vv. 19–20). The leadership principle is clear. When faced with opposition, great leaders stay focused on their mission rather than their critics.

PHASE 3: POWER MULTIPLICATION (Acts 4:23–37)

Released from custody, the apostles did not convene a strategy session or launch a public relations campaign. They prayed. Their prayer focused on God’s sovereignty: “Sovereign Lord, you made the heavens and the earth” (v. 24). They framed their situation with Scripture, quoting Psalm 2 about opposition to God’s anointed (vv. 25–26). They acknowledged current realities: “Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together ... to conspire against your holy servant Jesus” (vv. 27–28). And they asked boldly: “Enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness” (v. 29). God answered in power. “After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (v. 31). Maxwell observes, “The best leaders respond to pressure by going to their source of strength” (Leadership Gold, p. 78).

Opposition did not divide the church. It unified them. With one heart and mind, no one claimed that any possession was their own (v. 32). With great power, the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection (v. 33). Generosity marked the community: “There were no needy persons among them” (vv. 34–35). Barnabas modeled leadership by selling a field and giving the proceeds (vv. 36–37).

PHASE 4: INTERNAL CRISIS (Acts 5:1–16)

The greatest threats are not always external. Ananias and Sapphira sold property but secretly kept back part of the money while pretending to give it all. Peter confronted the deception, identifying the real enemy—“Satan has filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit” (v. 3)—and clarifying the issue. The problem was not the amount given but the lie itself (v. 4). God’s judgment fell, and both died immediately (vv. 5, 10). “Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events” (v. 11). Maxwell’s Law of Solid Ground declares, “Trust is the foundation of leadership” (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, p. 67).

Far from damaging the church, this discipline increased credibility. Many signs and wonders were done among the people (v. 12). Respect grew—“No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded” (v. 13). Yet the church continued to grow explosively—“More and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number” (v. 14). The impact spread regionally as crowds gathered from towns around Jerusalem (v. 16).

PHASE 5: ESCALATING PERSECUTION (Acts 5:17–42)

The high priest and the Sadducees arrested all the apostles and put them in public jail (vv. 17–18). During the night, an angel opened the doors and sent them back to their post with a simple command: “Go, stand in the temple courts and tell the people all about this new life” (vv. 19–21a). At daybreak, they obeyed, teaching the people as instructed (v. 21b). The authorities were bewildered. The jail was secure and empty, while the “prisoners” were preaching in the temple (vv. 22–26).

Once again before the Sanhedrin, the apostles faced a direct accusation: “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name ... yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching” (v. 28). Peter answered with the creed of courageous obedience: “We must obey God rather than human beings!” (v. 29). He preached the gospel again and concluded, “We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him” (v. 32). When the Sanhedrin wanted to kill them, Gamaliel—Paul’s future teacher—offered wise counsel: “Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God” (vv. 38–39).

The final outcome was sobering and inspiring. The apostles were flogged for defying orders, yet they rejoiced “because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name” (v. 41). They did not retreat. They continued daily, in the temple and from house to house, teaching and proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah (v. 42). Maxwell writes, “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy” (*The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader*, p. 67).

WHAT THEY GOT: VICTORY THROUGH OPPOSITION

Numbers grew despite pressure. The church moved from 3,000 (Acts 2:41) to 5,000 men (Acts 4:4), and “more and more men and women believed” (Acts

5:14). The impact expanded regionally beyond Jerusalem (Acts 5:16). Spiritual maturity deepened. They showed boldness under pressure as they spoke truth to power. Unity strengthened in crisis. Joy flourished in suffering as they rejoiced in persecution (Acts 5:41). Integrity was protected as they dealt decisively with internal sin. Leadership developed rapidly. Peter was transformed from denier to defender of the faith. The apostles stood in solidarity. They used every crisis as an opportunity and relied on God's power rather than human wisdom. Public impact increased. They were highly regarded by the people (Acts 5:13). Holy fear gripped the church (Acts 5:11). They enjoyed favor that continued to fuel growth. Their influence filled the city—"You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching" (Acts 5:28).

MAXWELL'S LEADERSHIP LAWS IN ACTION

They faced the Law of the Test—"Every leader faces tests that reveal character" (The 21 Most Powerful Minutes in a Leader's Day, p. 89). They proved the Law of Solid Ground as integrity under pressure built unshakeable trust (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, ch. 6). They embraced the Law of Sacrifice by giving up comfort and safety for the mission (ch. 18). And they lived the Law of Victory by finding ways to win even when circumstances looked impossible (ch. 15).

MODERN APPLICATION: THE OPPOSITION-OPPORTUNITY PRINCIPLE

When you face religious opposition, stay focused on your mission, not your critics. Respond with boldness rather than defensiveness. Point to God's power, not your own abilities. Guard unity under pressure so your team remains one heart and mind.

When experiencing rapid growth, never compromise integrity for the sake of numbers. Address internal issues quickly and decisively. Keep your systems aligned with your values. Use success to point people to God rather than to yourself.

When dealing with persecution, respond with prayer before strategy. Choose joy in being counted worthy to suffer for His Name. Continue your mission regardless of the consequences. Trust God's sovereignty over human opposition. Maxwell observes, "Every problem introduces a person to himself" (Failing Forward, p. 156).

YOUR WEEK 3 CHALLENGE

On Monday, assess opposition. Identify current resistance to your ministry or church and ask, “Is this opposition because we’re doing something wrong or something right?” Pray for wisdom to discern the difference. On Tuesday, evaluate power. Review recent ministry activities and ask whether you are operating in God’s power or human effort. Identify one area where you need to demonstrate God’s power more clearly and plan specific steps to depend on supernatural empowerment. On Wednesday, check unity. Meet with your leadership team and discuss how opposition affects your unity. Commit to praying together whenever criticism or challenges arise. On Thursday, audit integrity. Examine your ministry for any “Ananias and Sapphira” issues. Ask whether you are being completely honest about your motives and methods, and address any deception or half-truths immediately. On Friday, develop boldness. Identify one area where you have been timid about your message. Plan how to speak truth with both boldness and love, and practice articulating your core beliefs clearly and confidently. On Saturday, prepare for crisis. Develop a crisis response plan based on Acts 4:23–31 that includes prayer, a biblical perspective, bold requests, and unified action. Share this plan with your leadership team. On Sunday, practice joy in suffering. If you are facing opposition, choose rejoicing over complaining. Share with your congregation how God uses opposition for growth and celebrate examples of His power at work in difficulties.

Week 3 Goal: Transform your perspective on opposition from obstacle to opportunity.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

When criticized, do you get defensive, or do you stay focused on your mission? Are you trying to do supernatural work with natural strength? Does opposition divide or unite your leadership team? How do you handle deception or compromise in your organization? Can you honestly rejoice when facing opposition for doing right?

The Acts 3–5 formula is clear: Power plus Opposition plus Integrity plus Boldness equals Unstoppable Growth. Maxwell reminds us, “A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way” (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, p. 1). The early church leaders knew the way—God’s power. They went the way—facing opposition boldly. And they showed the way—maintaining integrity under pressure.

The promise stands. If we handle opposition like they handled opposition, we will get the same results they got—victory through adversity and growth through conflict.

CHAPTER 3: CRISIS AND GROWTH

Acts 6–7 — “If We Manage Crisis Like They Did ...”

WHAT THEY FACED

Success brought its own challenges. The early church was growing so fast that what began as a blessing threatened to become a burden. A crisis surfaced: “The Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food” (Acts 6:1). Beneath the complaint lay deeper issues. Cultural tensions simmered between Greek-speaking and Hebrew-speaking believers. Leadership overload mounted as the apostles tried to do everything. Resource management grew complicated as thousands needed daily care. Priorities blurred as urgent needs competed with the church’s essential mission. The stakes were high. Mishandled, this internal conflict could fracture the church and halt growth. Maxwell writes, “Every level of growth brings new problems. The key is not avoiding problems but developing better problem-solving skills” (The 15 Invaluable Laws of Growth, p. 134).

WHAT THEY DID: THE DELEGATION REVOLUTION

PHASE 1: PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION (Acts 6:1–2)

The complaint was specific: Greek-speaking widows were being neglected in the daily distribution, while Hebrew-speaking widows were cared for. The real issues included unconscious cultural bias favoring Hebrew speakers, a system breakdown with no organized process for fair distribution, a leadership bottleneck as the apostles were overwhelmed with administration, and mission drift as prayer and preaching slipped behind food service. The apostles responded with clarity: “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables” (v. 2). Maxwell’s Law of Priorities reminds us, “Leaders understand that activity is not necessarily accomplishment” (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, p. 187). Great leaders distinguish between what only they can do and what others can do better.

PHASE 2: STRATEGIC SOLUTION (Acts 6:3–6)

Their solution was delegation with discernment. “Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word” (vv. 3–4). The selection criteria emphasized character—full of the Spirit; competence—full of wisdom; community endorsement—chosen from among them; and proven reputation—known to be. The church chose Stephen, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a convert from Antioch (v. 5). Significantly, all seven had Greek names, demonstrating that the apostles addressed cultural bias by empowering the neglected group. Maxwell observes, “The best leaders don’t just solve problems; they empower others to solve problems” (*Developing the Leaders Around You*, p. 78). The installation was public and prayerful. The seven were presented before the congregation; the apostles prayed and laid hands on them, officially authorizing them and clearly transferring responsibility (v. 6).

PHASE 3: EXPLOSIVE RESULTS (Acts 6:7)

The outcome was immediate and dramatic: “So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith” (v. 7). Growth accelerated because the apostles refocused on their primary calling, new leaders handled practical needs with excellence, cultural barriers fell through inclusive leadership, and systems were established for sustainable growth. Even priests believed—the ultimate breakthrough. Maxwell’s Law of Empowerment rings true: “Only secure leaders give power to others” (*The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, p. 189).

WHAT THEY DID: STEPHEN’S COSTLY LEADERSHIP (Acts 6:8–7:60)

PHASE 1: POWER AND OPPOSITION (Acts 6:8–15)

Stephen emerged as a powerful leader. “Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people” (v. 8). Opposition gathered from various synagogues. They argued with Stephen, “but they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke” (vv. 9–10). When debate failed, deception followed. “They secretly persuaded some men to say, ‘We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God’” (v. 11). The crowd was stirred. False witnesses accused him: “This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law” (v. 13), distorting his message to say, “Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us” (v. 14).

In the midst of hostility, Stephen's composure was supernatural: "All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel" (v. 15). Maxwell writes, "Leadership is not about avoiding storms; it's about learning to dance in the rain" (Leadership Gold, p. 67).

PHASE 2: THE ULTIMATE DEFENSE (Acts 7:1–53)

Asked, "Are these charges true?" (v. 1), Stephen did not react defensively. Instead, he delivered a masterful, Spirit-empowered history that indicted his accusers. He traced God's work through Abraham (vv. 2–8), called out of his land; through Joseph (vv. 9–16), rejected by his brothers but used by God; through Moses (vv. 17–44), rejected by his people yet their deliverer; and through Solomon (vv. 45–50), who built the temple, while insisting, "The Most High does not live in houses made by human hands." Then came the indictment: "You always resist the Holy Spirit!" (vv. 51–53). The strength of Stephen's defense lay in its biblical foundation, its honest reading of Israel's historical pattern of rejecting God's messengers, its present application—"Just as your ancestors did, so do you" (v. 51)—and its direct accusation—"You who have received the law ... but have not obeyed it!" (v. 53). Maxwell's Law of Connection says, "Leaders touch a heart before they ask for a hand" (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, p. 101). Stephen connected with their history before confronting their hypocrisy.

PHASE 3: THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE (Acts 7:54–60)

The council exploded with rage. "When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him" (v. 54). Stephen's eyes were lifted to heaven. "Full of the Holy Spirit, [he] looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God'" (vv. 55–56). The mob covered their ears, rushed him, dragged him outside the city, and stoned him, while the witnesses laid their cloaks at Saul's feet (vv. 57–58). Stephen's final words echo his Lord's: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (v. 59) and "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (v. 60). He became the first Christian martyr, and in God's providence, his death accomplished more than his life.

WHAT THEY GOT: VICTORY THROUGH CRISIS AND SACRIFICE

From the delegation crisis came immediate results. The problem was solved and complaints ceased. Seven new leaders emerged. Growth accelerated—"The number of disciples ... increased rapidly" (Acts 6:7). Cultural barriers were

addressed with wisdom and equity. Long-term impact followed. Philip became an evangelist and later led the Samaritan revival (Acts 8). Stephen's martyrdom catalyzed worldwide mission. Delegation became the standard practice of the church. And "a large number of priests became obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).

From Stephen's martyrdom came a different kind of harvest. Persecution intensified—"On that day a great persecution broke out" (Acts 8:1). The church scattered—"All except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria" (Acts 8:1). The gospel spread—"Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went" (Acts 8:4). Saul was impacted deeply as he witnessed the stoning, a step on his journey to conversion. In the long term, worldwide missions expanded under the pressure of persecution. Saul's conversion turned the church's greatest enemy into its greatest advocate. A martyrdom model of costly discipleship took root. Heaven's perspective broke in—apparent defeat on earth can be victory in heaven. Maxwell observes, "Sometimes you win by losing" (Sometimes You Win, Sometimes You Learn, p. 89).

MAXWELL'S LEADERSHIP LAWS IN ACTION

The Law of Priorities (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, ch. 17) guided the apostles to focus on what only they could do—prayer and preaching. The Law of Empowerment (ch. 18) was evident as they gave real authority, not just tasks, to the seven. The Law of Sacrifice (ch. 18) was embodied by Stephen, who paid the ultimate price for his convictions. The Law of Legacy (ch. 21) emerged as both the delegation system and Stephen's martyrdom produced lasting impact across generations and geographies.

MODERN APPLICATION: THE CRISIS–GROWTH CONNECTION

When growth creates problems, identify the real issue—often cultural bias, not merely logistics. Empower the affected group; don't solve for them, solve with them. Establish clear criteria that prioritize character and competence over popularity. Transfer real authority; give power, not just responsibility. When leaders are overwhelmed, distinguish between what is essential and what is merely important—what only you can do versus what others can do better. Develop others proactively so crisis does not force delegation. Create systems for sustainability—build processes, not just one-off fixes. Focus on your strengths, just as the apostles did with prayer and teaching while deacons handled administration.

When facing opposition, stay calm under pressure—remember Stephen’s face “like the face of an angel.” Use truth as your defense; a biblical foundation beats political maneuvering. Keep an eternal perspective—“I see heaven open.” Forgive your enemies—“Do not hold this sin against them.” When making sacrifices, count the cost; leadership sometimes demands everything. Trust God’s purposes; what looks like defeat may be victory. Focus on legacy; ask how your sacrifice will advance the mission. Maintain integrity; do not compromise under pressure. Maxwell writes, “The ultimate measure of leadership is influence, and sometimes influence requires sacrifice” (The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader, p. 156).

YOUR WEEK 4 CHALLENGE

On Monday, conduct a delegation audit. List your current responsibilities, identify what only you can do versus what others could do better, and choose one significant responsibility to delegate this week. On Tuesday, develop leaders. Using Acts 6 criteria, identify potential leaders who are “full of the Spirit and wisdom,” and schedule development conversations with your top three candidates. On Wednesday, create a system where growth is creating problems. Design a sustainable process with clear criteria, steps, and accountability. On Thursday, clarify priorities. Define your primary calling as clearly as the apostles did, eliminate activities that distract from your core mission, and communicate these priorities to your team. On Friday, assess culture. Identify any groups who might feel neglected, look for unconscious bias in your systems, and take specific steps to ensure inclusive leadership. On Saturday, prepare for crisis. Develop a biblical response plan for opposition and practice articulating your core beliefs with both boldness and grace, committing to integrity regardless of consequences. On Sunday, evaluate sacrifice. Consider what your calling may require, ask, “Am I willing to pay any price to advance God’s kingdom?” and share with your congregation the importance of costly discipleship.

Week 4 Goal: Transform crisis into growth opportunity through strategic delegation and courageous leadership.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What responsibilities are you holding that others could handle better? Who are you actively preparing to take greater leadership roles? Where is growth creating problems that require systems, not Band-Aids? What might God be calling you to sacrifice for the sake of the mission? How do you want to be remembered—for what you accomplished, or for what you empowered others to accomplish?

The Acts 6–7 formula is clear: Crisis plus Delegation plus Development plus Sacrifice equals Exponential Growth. Maxwell reminds us, “A leader’s lasting value is measured by succession” (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, p. 279). The apostles created leaders who created other leaders. Stephen’s martyrdom set in motion Paul’s ministry. Philip’s empowerment opened the door to the Samaritan revival.

The promise stands. If we manage crisis like they managed crisis, we will see what they saw—exponential growth through strategic leadership development and sacrificial service.

CHAPTER 4: EXPANSION AND CONVERSION

Acts 8–9 — “If We Expand Like They Did ...”

WHAT THEY FACED

Stephen’s martyrdom was not the end of the movement—it was the beginning of a new phase. “On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria” (Acts 8:1). The new reality was stark. Believers were forcibly displaced and fled for their lives. Saul began a ruthless campaign: “Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison” (Acts 8:3). The movement was suddenly spread across new geography, demanding new strategies. Cultural barriers loomed large as the gospel confronted Samaritan and Gentile contexts. Leadership gaps emerged because the apostles remained in Jerusalem while others pioneered new territory. The test was clear. Would persecution stop the movement or spread it? Would barriers become walls or bridges? Maxwell notes, “Every great movement of God has been birthed in the womb of opposition” (Leadership Bible Commentary).

WHAT THEY DID: TURN SETBACKS INTO BREAKTHROUGHS

PHASE 1: PHILIP’S SAMARITAN BREAKTHROUGH (Acts 8:4–25)

Those who were scattered did not go silent. “Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there” (vv. 4–5). Philip’s strategy was simple and

courageous. He crossed entrenched cultural barriers—Jews did not associate with Samaritans—and he proclaimed Christ, keeping the message centered on Jesus. He demonstrated God’s power as impure spirits were driven out and the paralyzed and lame were healed (v. 7). The result was tangible: “So there was great joy in that city” (v. 8). Maxwell’s Law of the Catalyst applies: activity is not the same as accomplishment, but without activity, there is no accomplishment (The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork, p. 67).

The work was tested by the Simon challenge. Simon the sorcerer believed and was baptized, but when he saw the apostles lay hands on believers and the Holy Spirit come upon them, he offered money to buy this power. Peter replied, “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!” (v. 20). Great leaders distinguish genuine conversion from religious opportunism. The apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria to confirm the work and pray that the believers receive the Holy Spirit (vv. 14–17). This was not control for control’s sake; it was unity, ensuring that the Samaritan church remained connected to the Jerusalem church.

PHASE 2: PHILIP’S PERSONAL EVANGELISM (Acts 8:26–40)

God then redirected Philip to a divine appointment. “Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza’” (v. 26). On that road he met an Ethiopian eunuch, a high official of Queen Candace, who was reading Isaiah 53 in his chariot. Philip asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” (v. 30). The eunuch answered, “How can I, unless someone explains it to me?” (v. 31). Philip began where the man was—“beginning with that very passage of Scripture” (v. 35)—and told him the good news about Jesus. The response was immediate: “What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” (v. 36). Philip baptized him, and “the eunuch went on his way rejoicing” (v. 39). Maxwell observes, “Great leaders are available for divine appointments” (The 21 Most Powerful Minutes in a Leader’s Day, p. 45). Yielded to the Spirit’s leading, Philip experienced a transportation miracle: “The Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away ... Philip appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea” (vv. 39–40). He was so surrendered to God’s direction that supernatural movement became a normal means of ministry.

PHASE 3: SAUL’S DRAMATIC CONVERSION (Acts 9:1–31)

Saul, “still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples,” sought authority to arrest followers of the Way in Damascus (vv. 1–2). On the road, a light from heaven flashed around him, and he heard a voice: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (v. 4). “Who are you, Lord?” he asked. “I am Jesus, whom

you are persecuting ... Get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do” (vv. 5–6). Blinded for three days, Saul fasted and prayed (vv. 8–9).

God called Ananias to minister to Saul, though he was understandably reluctant. “Lord, I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem” (v. 13). The Lord answered, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel” (v. 15). Ananias obeyed. Saul received his sight, was filled with the Holy Spirit, and was baptized. Maxwell’s Law of Process reminds us, “Leadership develops daily, not in a day” (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, p. 23). Even Saul’s dramatic conversion unfolded within a Spirit-led process of development.

“At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God ... Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah” (vv. 20–22). When a plot formed to kill him, his followers lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall by night (vv. 23–25). Back in Jerusalem, the disciples feared him until Barnabas advocated, telling the apostles how Saul had seen the Lord and preached boldly (v. 27). The outcome of this season was profound. “So the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers” (v. 31).

WHAT THEY GOT: EXPONENTIAL EXPANSION

Persecution did not paralyze the church; it propelled it. Geographically, the movement expanded beyond Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria. Cross-cultural ministry unfolded as Jews brought the gospel to Samaritans. International impact began as the Ethiopian eunuch carried the message toward Africa. Leadership multiplied. Philip emerged—from deacon to evangelist. Scattered believers became scattered missionaries. New churches were planted wherever believers went.

From conversion came the ultimate turnaround. The movement’s greatest enemy became its greatest advocate as Saul became Paul. His persecution expertise was redirected from hunting Christians to planting churches. The Gentile mission was launched as God’s chosen instrument took shape for global expansion. The church was strengthened. Peace followed persecution as God provided a season of consolidation. Spiritual growth deepened as believers lived in the fear of the Lord. Numbers increased as the Holy Spirit continued to encourage and empower. Maxwell writes, “God’s greatest leaders often emerge

from God's greatest opposition" (Sometimes You Win, Sometimes You Learn, p. 123).

STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

Mission expansion moved forward in discernible phases. Phase 1 — Jerusalem — was effectively complete. Phase 2 — Judea and Samaria — was launched. Phase 3 — the ends of the earth — was prepared through Paul's calling. The leadership pipeline strengthened. Philip pioneered cross-cultural evangelism. Ananias modeled courageous obedience. Barnabas demonstrated the power of encouragement and advocacy. Paul emerged as the architect of global missions. Methodological breakthroughs were clarified. Personal evangelism was modeled by Philip and the Ethiopian. Power evangelism — signs and wonders — opened hearts in Samaria. Confrontational conversion marked Saul's Damascus Road encounter. Relational integration shone as Barnabas brought Paul to the apostles for acceptance and alignment.

MAXWELL'S LEADERSHIP LAWS IN ACTION

The Law of Navigation (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, ch. 3) is seen as Philip navigated cultural barriers and geographic challenges under divine guidance. The Law of Addition and Multiplication (ch. 19) played out as persecution scattered believers who multiplied the church wherever they went. The Law of Transformation (The 15 Invaluable Laws of Growth, ch. 15) is embodied in Saul's radical conversion. The Law of Connection (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, ch. 10) is evident in Ananias and Barnabas, who connected with difficult people others feared or avoided.

MODERN APPLICATION: THE EXPANSION PRINCIPLES

Turning setbacks into comebacks requires a new mindset. When facing persecution or opposition, scatter strategically — treat displacement as deployment. Preach everywhere — every new location becomes a mission field. Cross barriers boldly — opposition often opens new territory. Maintain joy — there was "great joy in that city" despite hardship. When encountering cultural barriers, start with common ground — Philip began with Isaiah 53. Demonstrate God's power — signs and wonders open hard hearts. Build bridges — do not let prejudice block ministry opportunity. Seek apostolic validation — maintain unity with existing leadership as you pioneer.

Conversion and development go hand in hand. When God brings unlikely converts, do not judge by the past—Saul seemed impossible. Obey divine instructions—Ananias overcame fear. Provide mentorship—Barnabas invested in Paul. Give opportunities to prove change—let new believers serve quickly and appropriately. For leadership pipelines, recognize emerging leaders—Philip stepped up during crisis. Develop people in their strengths—Philip excelled in evangelism more than administration. Create development opportunities—scattered believers became scattered missionaries. Connect people strategically—Barnabas knew how to open doors for others. Maxwell observes, “The greatest leaders see opportunities others miss” (Leadership Gold, p. 67).

Best practices for expansion include following divine direction as Philip did, adapting methods to context—one approach for Samaritans, another for an Ethiopian official—building on small successes since one convert can influence a continent, and maintaining connection with the sending base to preserve unity. For leadership multiplication, identify natural leaders who surface in crisis, invest in unlikely candidates—your fiercest opponent may become your greatest ally—create mentorship relationships that accelerate growth, and trust God’s sovereignty. He can reach anyone, anywhere, at any time.

YOUR WEEK 5 CHALLENGE

On Monday, conduct a setback assessment. Identify current challenges or “persecutions” in your ministry and ask, “How might God want to use these difficulties for expansion?” Look for opportunities hidden in obstacles. On Tuesday, evaluate barriers. List cultural, social, or geographic barriers in your community. Choose one to cross this week and plan specific steps to reach a previously unreached group. On Wednesday, practice personal evangelism. Follow Philip’s model with the Ethiopian. Find someone seeking truth and offer to explain Scripture, starting where they are. On Thursday, pray for an unlikely convert. Ask God to save the person who seems farthest, and be ready to obey if He calls you to connect. On Friday, assess your leadership pipeline. Identify emerging leaders—like Philip—who step up in challenges. Look for evangelistic gifts and plan how to develop and deploy these leaders. On Saturday, develop an expansion plan. Map your “Jerusalem” (current ministry geography), identify your “Judea and Samaria” (nearby regions), and dream about your “ends of the earth” (long-term vision). On Sunday, launch a mentorship initiative. Like Barnabas with Paul, identify someone who needs an advocate. Introduce a new believer or emerging leader to your leadership team and commit to ongoing mentorship.

Week 5 Goal: Transform current setbacks into expansion opportunities and develop new leaders for multiplication ministry.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How do you typically respond to persecution or opposition—retreat or advance? Which cultural or social barriers have you been avoiding instead of crossing? Whom have you written off as “too far gone” for God to save? How are you identifying and developing emerging leaders during challenging times? Are you thinking locally or globally about your ministry impact?

The Acts 8–9 formula is compelling: Persecution plus Evangelism plus Conversion plus Development equals Exponential Expansion. Maxwell reminds us, “A leader’s potential is determined by those closest to him” (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, p. 131). Philip, Ananias, Barnabas, and Paul became world-changers because the early church knew how to identify, develop, and deploy leaders in seasons of crisis and opportunity.

The promise remains. If we expand like they expanded—turning setbacks into comebacks, breaking barriers boldly, expecting unlikely conversions, and developing leaders strategically—we will see the same results: exponential growth through multiplication ministry.

CHAPTER 5: BREAKING BARRIERS

Acts 10–12 — “If We Break Barriers Like They Did ...”

WHAT THEY FACED

They were standing before the ultimate barrier. For 1,500 years, Jews had been taught that Gentiles were unclean, unreachable, and unwelcome in God’s covenant. Now God was about to shatter that barrier forever. The leadership challenge was complex. Peter’s own prejudice surfaced in his confession, “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean” (Acts 10:14). Jewish expectations had long assumed the Messiah would restore Israel, not include the nations. Church unity was at stake—how do you integrate people with completely different backgrounds? And a doctrinal question pressed for clarity: Must Gentiles become Jews first to become Christians? The stakes could not have been higher. This decision would determine whether Christianity remained a Jewish sect or became a global movement. Maxwell writes, “The biggest

barriers to breakthrough are often in our own minds” (Thinking for a Change, p. 89).

WHAT THEY DID: DIVINE VISION MEETS HUMAN OBEDIENCE

PHASE 1: PETER’S PARADIGM SHIFT (Acts 10:1–23)

God began the breakthrough with two visions and one Spirit-led meeting. Cornelius, a Roman centurion described as devout and God-fearing, received angelic instruction: “Send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter” (vv. 1–8, esp. v. 5). Meanwhile, on a rooftop in Joppa, Peter fell into a trance and saw a sheet filled with unclean animals. He heard the voice of God: “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat” (v. 13). Peter resisted: “Surely not, Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean” (v. 14). God replied, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean” (v. 15). The vision repeated three times. God was insisting on a paradigm shift. As Maxwell’s Law of Process reminds us, “Leadership develops daily, not in a day” (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, p. 23). Even Peter needed time and repetition to grasp the magnitude of this change.

While Peter pondered the vision, Cornelius’s messengers arrived. The Holy Spirit said, “Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them” (v. 20). Peter obeyed at once, inviting the Gentile messengers into the house—breaking Jewish custom—and left with them the next day (vv. 21–23).

PHASE 2: THE CAESAREA BREAKTHROUGH (Acts 10:24–48)

In Caesarea, Cornelius had gathered family and friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius fell at his feet, but Peter lifted him up. “Stand up; I am only a human being” (v. 26). Then Peter declared the new paradigm: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection” (vv. 28–29). Cornelius explained his vision and concluded, “Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us” (vv. 30–33).

Peter’s sermon was revolutionary. “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right” (vv. 34–35). He preached Jesus—His life and ministry, “doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil” (v. 38), His death and resurrection, “They killed him by hanging him on a cross. But God raised him

from the dead” (vv. 39–40), and His universal offer of forgiveness: “Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (v. 43).

God interrupted the sermon with the Holy Spirit. “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers ... were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God” (vv. 44–46). Peter responded decisively: “Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” He ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (vv. 47–48). Leadership learns this lesson well: when God moves, great leaders adapt their methods to align with His purposes. As Maxwell observes, “Leaders must be quick to adapt but slow to abandon their core values” (Leadership Gold, p. 134).

PHASE 3: THE JERUSALEM CONFRONTATION (Acts 11:1–18)

News spread quickly. “The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.” When Peter returned to Jerusalem, some criticized, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them” (vv. 1–3). Peter did not react defensively. He “began and explained everything ... precisely as it had happened” (v. 4). He recounted the vision and God’s command, described the Spirit’s direction—“The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them”—and reported the parallel experience—“The Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning” (vv. 12, 15). His conclusion was unassailable: “So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?” (v. 17). The church fell silent, then praised God. “So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life” (v. 18). Maxwell’s Law of Buy-In applies: “People buy into the leader, then the vision” (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, p. 137). Peter’s credibility carried the day.

PHASE 4: THE ANTIOCH EXPLOSION (Acts 11:19–30)

The persecution that followed Stephen’s death had scattered believers far and wide. Many spoke only to Jews, but some from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch and preached to Greeks as well (vv. 19–20). “The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord” (v. 21). Jerusalem sent Barnabas to investigate. “When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts” (v. 23). Barnabas proved an encourager, “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith,” and the church grew even more (v. 24). He

showed his skill as a recruiter and developer by going to Tarsus to find Saul and bringing him to Antioch. For a full year, they taught great numbers (vv. 25–26). The impact was seismic. “The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch” (v. 26). A new identity formed around Christ, not ethnicity or prior religious affiliation.

PHASE 5: THE PERSECUTION CYCLE (Acts 12:1–25)

Meanwhile, persecution surged. King Herod arrested believers, executed James the brother of John, and then seized Peter (vv. 1–3). “So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him” (v. 5). God sent an angel; chains fell, guards slept, iron gates opened, and Peter walked free. “Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches” (v. 11). Peter went to the prayer meeting at Mary’s house, where believers struggled to believe their prayer had been answered—“You’re out of your mind!” they told Rhoda when she reported Peter at the door (v. 15). It is a sobering leadership insight: sometimes the church prays for miracles but struggles to believe when they happen.

Herod’s pride proved fatal. After accepting the crowd’s worship as if he were a god, “immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died. But the word of God continued to spread and flourish” (vv. 23–24). Maxwell warns, “Pride goes before destruction, and leadership without humility is leadership without longevity” (The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader, p. 78).

WHAT THEY GOT: THE GLOBAL CHURCH

Barrier-breaking produced breakthroughs at every level. Theologically, God’s people embraced Gentile inclusion—“God does not show favoritism” (Acts 10:34). Salvation was proclaimed as universal in scope—“Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness” (Acts 10:43). Equal access was confirmed as Gentiles received the Holy Spirit just as Jews had. A new identity emerged—“Christians”—followers of Christ, not converts to Judaism.

Geographically, the gospel advanced into Caesarea, a Roman military center; Antioch, a major commercial hub that became a mission base; and beyond, as evangelists from Cyprus and Cyrene pioneered cross-cultural work. The foundation for worldwide missions was laid. Leadership developed rapidly. Peter grew from a prejudiced fisherman into a barrier-breaking apostle. Barnabas encouraged, recruited, and developed leaders. Paul was brought from Tarsus to

Antioch for preparation. Local Gentile believers were quickly integrated into ministry.

Organizationally, structures flexed without fracturing. Jerusalem remained a center but no longer the sole authority. Antioch became a launch pad for future missions. Diversity was celebrated as Jews and Gentiles worshiped together, and unity was maintained despite cultural differences. Mission strategy matured. The church learned cross-cultural competence—adapting methods while maintaining the message. God validated the barrier-breaking with signs and wonders. Local ownership grew as new believers took immediate leadership, and a multiplication mindset took root—every barrier broken opened new territory.

Maxwell's leadership laws were on full display. The Law of Navigation shows in Peter's journey through cultural prejudice toward God's global vision (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, ch. 3). The Law of Solid Ground is evident as Peter's integrity enabled the Jerusalem church to trust his controversial decisions (ch. 6). The Law of Connection shines in Barnabas, who bridged Jewish and Gentile believers. The Law of Explosive Growth explains the outcome—breaking barriers led to multiplication, not mere addition (ch. 19).

MODERN APPLICATION: THE BARRIER-BREAKING BLUEPRINT

Begin by identifying barriers to break. Cultural barriers persist—racial prejudice, class divides, generational gaps, and language limitations. Ask who cannot access your ministry and why. Religious barriers also hinder—denominational walls, theological prejudices, lifestyle judgments, and painful past experiences that block new relationships. Name them honestly.

Follow the Peter process for barrier-breaking. Step 1 is Divine Vision (Acts 10:9–16). Pray regularly, and stay open to God challenging your assumptions. Listen carefully—He may repeat crucial messages. Be willing to move from “I have never ...” to “I will now ...” Step 2 is Courageous Obedience (Acts 10:17–23). Act despite uncertainty; Peter did not fully understand yet obeyed. Break your own rules when love requires stepping beyond comfort. Bring others along as witnesses and partners. Move quickly—do not let fear talk you out of God's direction. Step 3 is Authentic Connection (Acts 10:24–43). Start with humility—“I am only a human being.” Share your growth—“God has shown me ...” Keep the gospel central across cultures. Expect God to move; be ready for supernatural confirmation. Step 4 is Defend Your Actions (Acts 11:1–18). Tell the whole story—do not merely defend conclusions; explain God's process. Point to His activity

—“Who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?” Stay united by helping others see what God is doing. Praise Him together when breakthroughs come.

Build a barrier-breaking culture. Develop leaders who are natural bridge-builders —find your Barnabases. Train your team for cultural competence. Create diverse leadership that reflects the people you aim to reach. Celebrate and share stories of barriers falling. Align organizational systems with your mission. Audit for hidden barriers that keep some from feeling welcome. Adapt communication to how different groups receive information. Keep the message while changing the methods. Measure inclusion so you know whether diversity is real or imagined. Maxwell observes, “Diversity is not about political correctness; it’s about kingdom effectiveness” (Everyone Communicates, Few Connect, p. 89).

YOUR WEEK 6 CHALLENGE

On Monday, conduct a barrier assessment. List the cultural, social, or economic barriers in your community. Identify which groups are not represented in your church. Ask God which barriers He wants you to break first. On Tuesday, seek vision. Spend extended time in prayer like Peter on the rooftop, asking God to challenge your assumptions about who is reachable. Record any insights you receive. On Wednesday, plan a connection. Choose one person from a different background to build a relationship with. Have a meaningful conversation that listens first and looks for common ground while respecting differences. On Thursday, develop a team. Identify potential “Barnabas” leaders who build bridges naturally. Plan to grow their cross-cultural skills and begin recruiting diverse voices to your leadership team. On Friday, evaluate methods. Audit your current ministry practices for cultural barriers. Ask, “What do we do that might exclude certain groups?” Plan specific adaptations while keeping your core message intact. On Saturday, build courage. Identify one barrier you have been afraid to cross. Plan concrete steps beyond your comfort zone and recruit prayer partners to support your obedience.

Week 6 Goal: Break at least one significant barrier that has been limiting your church’s reach and impact.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Which groups of people do you instinctively avoid or judge, and why? When has God challenged your assumptions about who is reachable or worthy? What barriers is God calling you to cross that you have been resisting? Who in your

church has the gift of building bridges across differences? What unspoken barriers keep some from feeling truly welcome in your church?

The Acts 10–12 formula is compelling: Divine Vision plus Courageous Obedience plus Authentic Connection plus Unified Defense equals Barrier-Breaking Breakthrough. Maxwell reminds us, “A leader’s potential is determined by those closest to him” (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, p. 131). Peter’s breakthrough was not merely personal—it opened the door for the entire church to embrace God’s global vision. When leaders break barriers, they give others permission to do the same.

The promise holds. If we break barriers as they did—through divine vision, courageous obedience, authentic connection, and unified support—we will see similar results: explosive growth through inclusive ministry that reaches every person in our community.

CHAPTER 6: FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Acts 13–15 — “If We Go Global Like They Did ...”

WHAT THEY FACED

The barrier-breaking breakthrough with Gentiles created a new question: How do you systematically reach the unreached world? The church at Antioch emerged as a launch pad—a diverse community ready to send missionaries into uncharted territory. There was no roadmap for cross-cultural church planting, and the cultural complexity was real: How much should Gentiles adopt Jewish customs? Opposition waited in every direction, from both Jewish and pagan communities. Leadership questions pressed in as well: Who leads? Who sends? Who decides policy?

Could they develop a reproducible strategy for global missions that would work in any culture? As Maxwell writes, “Vision without a strategy remains an illusion” (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, p. 45).

WHAT THEY DID: THE STRATEGIC MISSIONS BLUEPRINT

PHASE 1: DIVINE SENDING (Acts 13:1–3)

The leadership team at Antioch included Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch), and Saul (v. 1). Their diversity was itself a statement of the gospel's reach—Barnabas, a Jewish Levite from Cyprus; Simeon called Niger, likely African (Niger means “black”); Lucius from Cyrene in North Africa; Manaen, connected to political power; and Saul, a former Pharisee and Roman citizen. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit spoke clearly: “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (v. 2). So, after further fasting and prayer, the church laid hands on them and sent them off (v. 3).

Notice the order and principles at work. Worship preceded work; the call came in the context of worship. Prayer confirmed direction; fasting and prayer preceded sending. The team validated the calling; there was corporate confirmation of an individual call. And authority transferred through the laying on of hands, signaling official authorization. As Maxwell's Law of Process reminds us, “Leadership develops daily, not in a day” (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, p. 23).

PHASE 2: THE REPRODUCIBLE METHOD (Acts 13:4–14:28)

Their first stop was Cyprus (13:4–12). Strategically, they began with Barnabas's homeland—familiar territory first. Opposition arose quickly. Bar-Jesus, a sorcerer, tried to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Paul confronted him: “You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right!” (v. 10), and the sorcerer was struck blind. The result was powerful: “When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord” (v. 12). From there, a leadership shift becomes evident: “From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia” (v. 13). It is now “Paul and his companions,” not “Barnabas and Saul.”

In Pisidian Antioch (13:13–52), they entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and sat down (v. 14). Paul's method was consistent and wise. He started with Scripture, using the Old Testament as a foundation. He connected the promises to Christ: “What God promised our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus” (vv. 32–33). And he called for decision: “Through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you” (v. 38). The audience response moved through a familiar arc—initial interest as many Jews and devout converts followed Paul and Barnabas (v. 43), swelling crowds until almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord (v. 44), and rising religious opposition as jealousy took root (v. 45). This led to a pivotal decision: “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider

yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth’” (vv. 46–47). The Gentiles received the message with joy, honored the word, and those appointed to eternal life believed, as the word spread through the whole region (vv. 48–49). Persecution was organized against the missionaries, and they were expelled, but they shook the dust from their feet and went to Iconium. The disciples, nevertheless, were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit (vv. 50–52).

The same pattern unfolded in Iconium and Lystra (14:1–20). They began in the synagogue, met a mixed response, and ministered with signs and wonders as the Lord confirmed the message of His grace (14:3). Opposition intensified, with plots to stone them. In Lystra, Paul healed a man lame from birth, and the crowd cried, “The gods have come down to us in human form!” They called Barnabas Zeus and Paul Hermes. Paul’s response was humble and clear: “Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God” (v. 15). Soon after, opponents from Antioch and Iconium turned the crowd, and Paul was stoned and dragged outside the city, thought to be dead. But when the disciples gathered around him, he rose and went back into the city (vv. 19–20). As Maxwell observes, “The measure of a leader is not what he does in moments of comfort and convenience, but what he does in times of challenge and controversy” (The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader, p. 67).

PHASE 3: CHURCH ESTABLISHMENT (Acts 14:21–28)

On the return journey, their strategy was intentional. They made disciples—“They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples.” They strengthened churches—returning to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch to strengthen the disciples. They appointed leaders—elders in every church. And they committed these leaders and churches to the Lord with prayer and fasting (vv. 21–23). The model was reproducible: evangelize by preaching the gospel, establish by planting churches, equip by appointing local leaders, encourage by returning to strengthen, and entrust by committing the work to God’s care. Finally, they sailed back to Antioch, gathered the church, and reported “all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles” (vv. 24–28).

PHASE 4: THE GENTILE CONTROVERSY (Acts 15:1–35)

A crisis arose in Antioch when some taught, “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved” (v. 1). This was not a small matter. It touched the very heart of the gospel and the future of the movement. Would Christianity remain a Jewish sect or become a global faith?

At the Jerusalem Council, Peter reminded the assembly that God had already shown His will by giving the Holy Spirit to Gentiles, just as He had to Jews. “We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are” (vv. 7–11). Paul and Barnabas recounted the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through their ministry (v. 12). Then James, leading the church in Jerusalem, rendered judgment: “We should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals, and from blood” (vv. 19–20). An official letter was sent, affirming that Gentiles did not need circumcision, but should abstain from practices that would unnecessarily offend Jewish believers (vv. 22–29). The result was joy and encouragement as the believers received the decision and were strengthened (vv. 30–35). As Maxwell’s Law of Navigation says, “Anyone can steer the ship, but it takes a leader to chart the course” (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, p. 17). The Jerusalem Council charted the course for global Christianity.

WHAT THEY GOT: THE GLOBAL CHURCH BLUEPRINT

From these labors emerged a strategic, reproducible methodology. The pattern was systematic—begin in the synagogue, then turn to the Gentiles, plant a church, appoint leaders, and move on, trusting God with ongoing growth. The message remained the same, while methods flexed to fit culture. Indigenous leadership was the default, with local believers leading from day one. Ongoing support came through return visits that strengthened and encouraged.

Theologically, the church clarified essential truths. Salvation is by grace through faith alone—not faith plus works. Gentiles did not need to become Jews to become Christians. Unity was defined by gospel essentials, while cultural diversity was honored. The vision expanded toward every nation, tribe, and tongue.

Organizationally, sending churches commissioned missionaries. Ministry was done in teams, not solo. Accountability was practiced through reports back to sending churches. Leadership development was immediate, with a clear focus on raising up local leaders.

The measurable results were undeniable. Geographically, the gospel advanced through Cyprus and Galatia, and foundations were laid across Asia Minor. The strategy was proven and ready for replication. Leadership multiplied—Paul emerged as a primary missionary, elders were appointed locally, and team members like Silas and Timothy were recruited. Church planting became the consistent outcome—every stop resulted in new congregations. Culturally, Gentile inclusion was affirmed by official policy. Jewish–Gentile unity was modeled through practical solutions. A global identity crystallized around the name “Christian,” born in the diversity of Antioch. Missional DNA took root: every church became a sending church.

MAXWELL’S LEADERSHIP LAWS IN ACTION

They lived the Law of Legacy by building systems that would outlast them. They demonstrated the Law of Explosive Growth by multiplying leaders for exponential expansion. They exemplified the Law of Navigation as the Jerusalem Council guided the church through its most crucial decision. And they embraced the Law of Sacrifice as Paul endured stoning and relentless opposition for the sake of the mission.

MODERN APPLICATION: THE GLOBAL MISSIONS MODEL

Before you go, embrace strategic sending. Worship and fast, seeking God’s direction through spiritual disciplines. Confirm calling through corporate validation, not merely personal conviction. Build diverse teams that bring multiple perspectives and cultural strengths. Establish clear lines of accountability and communication with the sending church.

Follow Paul’s method for church planting. In your entry strategy, start with existing connections and natural cultural bridges. Seek out receptive people—those already leaning toward truth. Demonstrate authenticity so your character speaks before your message. Expect opposition and plan for resistance from established systems. In your gospel presentation, use familiar foundations, connect everything to Christ, call for a clear decision, and form community immediately by integrating new believers into fellowship. For church establishment, develop leaders quickly without waiting for “perfect” candidates. Create systems that can function without you. Address cultural issues wisely where traditions conflict with faith. And plan your exit from day one, working yourself out of a job.

When cultural controversies arise, use the Jerusalem Council model. Listen to all sides. Look for where the Holy Spirit is already working. Focus on essentials, separating the core of the gospel from cultural preferences. Create practical solutions that address real concerns without compromising truth. Communicate clearly so all are strengthened. As Maxwell notes, “Great leaders ask great questions” (Good Leaders Ask Great Questions, p. 23). Ask: What is essential to the gospel and what is cultural preference? How do we maintain unity while allowing diversity? What barriers have we created that God never intended? How can we honor multiple cultures while serving Christ together?

YOUR WEEK 7 CHALLENGE

This week, take action toward a truly global vision. On Monday, list all people groups represented in your community, identify which groups your church is not effectively reaching, and research unreached peoples locally and globally. On Tuesday, study Paul’s reproducible strategy—Synagogue → Gentiles → Plant church → Develop leaders → Move on—adapt it to your context, and identify your “synagogue” equivalent where seekers gather. On Wednesday, identify ministry partners from different cultural backgrounds and plan how to build diverse teams, including a “Barnabas” encourager. On Thursday, identify potential leaders in your community, develop indigenous leadership quickly, and design systems that do not require constant supervision. On Friday, surface cultural barriers that hinder your message, adapt methods while guarding the core gospel, and address any “circumcision” issues—unnecessary requirements you may have added. On Saturday, craft a systematic approach to reaching your community, plan for multiplication rather than mere addition, and create support structures for new efforts. On Sunday, call your church to become a sending church, share the vision for local and global missions, and begin praying about who God might be calling into cross-cultural ministry.

CHAPTER 7: EUROPEAN EXPANSION

Acts 16–18 — “If We Cross Into Europe Like They Did ...”

WHAT THEY FACED

Closed doors forced fresh direction. The Holy Spirit forbade them to speak the word in Asia and Bithynia, then a night vision redirected them across the Aegean to Macedonia—a decisive leap from Asia to Europe (Acts 16:6–10). How do you plant the gospel in Roman colonies, philosophical centers, and commercial hubs with no prior foothold? Resistance would be legal in the hands of magistrates, spiritual in the clash with demonic powers, cultural in the world of Epicureans and Stoics, and economic where transformed lives threatened trade. Team composition was changing as well—Paul, Silas, Timothy, and now Luke entered the narrative—requiring clarity of roles and unity of purpose. Could they form an entry strategy for hard, secular cities and remain long enough to lay deep roots? As Maxwell reminds us, “Vision without a strategy remains an illusion” (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, p. 45).

WHAT THEY DID: THE EUROPE LAUNCH PLAYBOOK

PHASE 1: GUIDED AND READY (Acts 16:1–10)

Paul added Timothy at Lystra, a young leader well spoken of by the believers. He circumcised him, not for salvation but for mission access among Jews (Acts 16:3), applying the Jerusalem Council’s theology strategically on the ground. They delivered the decisions of the apostles to strengthen the churches (16:4–5). Twice the Spirit said “No,” then the Macedonian vision said “Come over and help us.” They concluded together that God had called them and moved immediately (16:10)—spiritual sensitivity joined to decisive execution. As Maxwell’s Law of Navigation teaches, leaders chart the course before they steer it (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, p. 17).

PHASE 2: PHILIPPI—A CHURCH FROM A PRAYER MEETING (Acts 16:11–40)

Philippi, a proud Roman colony, lacked a synagogue, so they searched for a place of prayer by the river. Lydia, a dealer in purple, listened; “The Lord opened her heart,” and her household was baptized (Acts 16:14–15). Her hospitality became gospel headquarters. Deliverance of a slave girl from a spirit of divination triggered economic backlash; Paul and Silas were beaten and jailed without trial. At midnight they prayed and sang; an earthquake opened doors, and the jailer, poised for suicide, heard, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household” (16:31). He washed their wounds; they watched his sins washed away in baptism. By morning, Paul asserted Roman citizenship, securing public vindication and protection for the young church (16:37–39). The pattern is clear: begin with a spiritual beachhead, expect backlash, turn suffering into testimony, and use legal status wisely to guard the flock.

PHASE 3: THESSALONICA AND BEREA—REASON AND READINESS (Acts 17:1–15)

In Thessalonica, Paul reasoned from the Scriptures for three Sabbaths, explaining that the Messiah had to suffer and rise and identifying Jesus as the Christ (Acts 17:2–3). Some Jews, many God-fearing Greeks, and leading women believed. Jealous opponents formed a mob, assaulted Jason's house, and accused the missionaries of "turning the world upside down" (17:6). In Berea, the posture shifted; they received the word with eagerness and examined the Scriptures daily to test the message (17:11). Many believed, yet opposition pursued Paul there as well. The method held: reason from shared authority, honor sincere inquiry, and anticipate organized resistance that follows momentum.

PHASE 4: ATHENS—CONTEXTUALIZING FOR THE THINKERS (Acts 17:16–34)

Provoked by a city full of idols, Paul engaged both synagogue and marketplace until he was invited to the Areopagus. He connected with observed culture through the altar "to an unknown god," affirmed common grace by presenting God as Creator, Giver, and Sustainer, confronted error by declaring God is not made by human hands, called for repentance in light of the appointed judgment, and crowned Christ with resurrection authority (Acts 17:22–31). Responses ranged from mockery to curiosity to conversion—Dionysius, Damaris, and others believed. The lesson is simple: begin where people are, lead them to who God is, and bring them to what God has done in Christ. As Maxwell notes, leaders "must connect before they direct" (Leadership 101, p. 45).

PHASE 5: CORINTH—STAYING LONG ENOUGH FOR DEPTH (Acts 18:1–23)

In Corinth—commercial, immoral, and influential—Paul worked with Aquila and Priscilla as a tentmaker while teaching every Sabbath. When opposed, he shifted next door to Titius Justus's house; the synagogue ruler Crispus believed with his household (Acts 18:8). The Lord appeared by night with a strengthening word: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you ... I have many people in this city" (18:9–10). Paul stayed eighteen months. A legal challenge before Gallio was dismissed, creating a favorable precedent that gave the movement breathing room (18:12–17). On departure, he took Aquila and Priscilla to Ephesus, reasoned briefly in the synagogue, and then returned to Antioch, completing the journey. Meanwhile Apollos, eloquent but limited, was discipled by Priscilla and Aquila for greater accuracy and impact (18:24–28). The principles surface: leverage marketplace vocation, plant in homes, receive courage to stay, use the courts when appropriate, and develop emerging leaders who will carry the work forward.

WHAT THEY GOT: BEACHHEADS, PRECEDENTS, AND A CITY PLAYBOOK

Europe opened and real conversions took root. Households like Lydia's and the jailer's, hosts like Jason and Titius Justus, and leaders like Crispus testified that God was establishing communities across social strata. A coherent strategy for secular cities emerged—enter through existing networks, start where seekers already gather, reason from shared foundations, contextualize without compromise, and anchor congregations in homes that become mission hubs. Endurance was matched by protection; midnight songs turned to salvation, public vindication in Philippi protected the fledgling church, and Gallio's ruling in Corinth created legal space for growth. Teams multiplied—Timothy was empowered, Luke entered the story, Priscilla and Aquila matured into disciple-makers, and Apollos was sharpened for greater effectiveness. Most importantly, they refined a reproducible method for hard places: pray and listen, move on divine timing, find persons of peace, expect spiritual and economic pushback, turn hardship into testimony, and assert legal rights wisely to safeguard the mission. Depth replaced drive-by ministry; they moved quickly where doors were narrow and stayed long where cities were strategic. As Maxwell reminds us, "Leadership develops daily, not in a day" (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, p. 23).

MAXWELL'S LEADERSHIP LAWS IN ACTION

They practiced the Law of Navigation by discerning closed doors and charting a Spirit-led route to Macedonia. They modeled the Law of Connection in Athens by starting where hearers were and building a bridge to Christ. They embraced the Law of Sacrifice through beating, imprisonment, and risk for the sake of the gospel. They applied the Law of Process by remaining eighteen months in Corinth to develop durable disciples. They lived the Law of the Inner Circle by raising Timothy, equipping Priscilla and Aquila, and sharpening Apollos—expanding capacity by developing leaders who could lead others.

MODERN APPLICATION: HOW TO ENTER HARD, SECULAR CITIES

Follow the Spirit with a plan. Pray, fast, and test impressions in community, then act decisively when God confirms direction. Build diverse teams that strengthen one another on the way, valuing couples and marketplace leaders whose homes and vocations can become strategic platforms. Seek persons of peace whose credibility and hospitality can host a gospel beachhead; let households catalyze congregations. Learn the idols and ideas of your city, using shared language to lead people to the lordship and resurrection of Jesus; connect before you correct, then call for a clear response. Expect opposition—economic,

ideological, and legal—and prepare to suffer well; sing in the night, and use appropriate legal avenues to protect the vulnerable and the work. Blend vocation and mission so excellence at work commends your message and opens doors. Stay where God says stay; ask for Corinth-style courage to keep speaking in strategic places. Develop leaders early; teach accurately, hand off ministry, and, like Priscilla and Aquila with Apollos, offer private, gracious coaching that multiplies impact. As Maxwell notes, “Great leaders ask great questions” (Good Leaders Ask Great Questions, p. 23).

YOUR WEEK 8 CHALLENGE

This week, practice European-expansion leadership that is Spirit-led, city-smart, and team-centered. On Monday, pray and plan by mapping your city’s closed doors and open doors; name where God has been saying “not here, not now” and where He is saying “come over and help us,” then write your next faithful step. On Tuesday, identify your person of peace by surveying your workplace, neighborhood, and affinity networks; discern who shows openness, credibility, and hospitality, and invite one to host a discovery gathering. On Wednesday, contextualize the message by drafting a five-minute gospel explanation for skeptics in your city that begins with shared foundations—creation, conscience, and longing—and culminates in the resurrection and a clear call to repent and believe (Acts 17:30–31). On Thursday, prepare for pushback by naming likely points of resistance and outlining a response that is truthful, gentle, and legally aware; clarify when and how you will appropriately assert rights to protect the work, following the models in Philippi and Corinth. On Friday, practice marketplace mission by serving with excellence at work or in the community and scheduling one intentional follow-up conversation that naturally connects to faith. On Saturday, build your inner circle by naming three emerging leaders—include women and couples—and pairing each with a concrete next step such as co-leading a group, teaching a session, or hosting in their home. On Sunday, launch or strengthen a house hub by gathering for Scripture, prayer, and a meal; share how God guided you this week and ask Him for a Corinth-style word of courage for your city.

CHAPTER 9: TRIALS AND TESTIMONY

Acts 22–26 — “If We Endure Like They Did ...”

WHAT THEY FACED

Paul entered the ultimate leadership test. Over roughly five years of hearings, imprisonments, and legal maneuvers that could have ended his ministry, he turned every courtroom into a pulpit and every chain into a platform for gospel advance. The challenges mounted. False accusations charged him as “a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world” (Acts 24:5). Political manipulation meant governors cared more about favor than justice. Prolonged imprisonment kept him in Caesarea for two years awaiting resolution (Acts 24:27). Assassination plots formed, with more than forty men vowing not to eat or drink until they had killed him (Acts 23:12–13). His future remained uncertain; appealing to Caesar would carry him to Rome—and to possible execution. Would his faith crack under pressure, or would these trials become his greatest testimony? As Maxwell writes, “Adversity causes some men to break; others to break records” (Failing Forward, p. 89).

WHAT THEY DID: TRANSFORM OBSTACLES INTO OPPORTUNITIES

PHASE 1: THE JERUSALEM DEFENSE (Acts 22:1–29)

Dragged from the temple and nearly killed by a mob, Paul was rescued by the Roman commander, Claudius Lysias (Acts 21:30–36). He requested permission to speak and addressed the crowd in Hebrew—their heart language—using his testimony as his framework. He established credibility: “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors” (22:3). He confessed his persecution of the Way, recounted his Damascus road encounter with Jesus, and revealed his calling: “Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles” (22:21). The crowd listened until he said this; then they shouted, “Rid the earth of him! He’s not fit to live!” (22:22–23). When officials prepared to flog him, he calmly asserted his Roman citizenship: “Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty?” (22:25). He used a hostile platform to share his story and advanced his mission while securing lawful protection.

PHASE 2: THE SANHEDRIN STRATEGY (Acts 22:30–23:35)

Before the Sanhedrin, Paul read the room with precision. “My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead” (23:6). Knowing the council was divided—Pharisees affirming resurrection, Sadducees denying it—he shifted the battle line from himself to their theological split. The council erupted, and the commander intervened to prevent violence. That night, the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome” (23:11). When more than forty conspirators vowed to kill him,

Paul's nephew uncovered the plot and alerted authorities. Commander Lysias organized an armed escort—two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen—to transfer Paul safely to Governor Felix in Caesarea (23:23–35). As Maxwell observes, “God’s protection often comes through human preparation” (Leadership Gold, p. 134).

PHASE 3: THE FELIX ENCOUNTERS (Acts 24:1–27)

In Caesarea, the high priest Ananias arrived with the lawyer Tertullus, who accused Paul of inciting riots and desecrating the temple (24:5–6). Paul’s defense was factual, principled, and missional. He noted the short timeframe in Jerusalem, challenged the absence of evidence for any disturbance, affirmed his faith as worship of the God of their ancestors according to the Law and the Prophets, and stated his mission of bringing gifts to the poor and offerings in Jerusalem (24:11–20). Felix, familiar with the Way, delayed judgment, yet allowed Paul some freedoms and frequent visitors. Over two years, Paul repeatedly spoke with Felix and Drusilla about faith in Christ, righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment; Felix grew afraid and postponed decisions while secretly hoping for a bribe (24:24–27). Paul turned incarceration into an extended evangelistic appointment with the governor.

PHASE 4: THE FESTUS APPEAL (Acts 25:1–12)

When Festus replaced Felix, Jewish leaders immediately pressed for Paul’s transfer to Jerusalem, plotting an ambush. Festus kept the proceedings in Caesarea. Sensing the risk of a Jerusalem hearing and aiming at his Rome assignment, Paul made a decisive move: “I am now standing before Caesar’s court, where I ought to be tried... I appeal to Caesar!” (25:10–11). Festus conferred and replied, “You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!” (25:12). Paul navigated the system to align process with calling. As Maxwell’s Law of Navigation puts it, “Anyone can steer the ship, but it takes a leader to chart the course” (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, p. 17).

PHASE 5: THE AGRIPPA OPPORTUNITY (Acts 25:13–26:32)

King Agrippa and Bernice visited Festus, who explained Paul’s case and his Roman appeal, admitting, “I found he had done nothing deserving of death” (25:25). The next day, with great pomp, Agrippa, Bernice, military officers, and city leaders assembled, and Paul was brought in (25:23). Given permission to speak, Paul delivered his masterpiece. He began with personal testimony: his life known among the Jews from childhood, his former zeal opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth (26:4–11). He detailed the Damascus encounter and the commission of Jesus: “I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn

them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God” (26:17–18). He described his obedient response: “I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven... I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds” (26:19–20). When Festus interrupted, calling him insane, Paul answered with calm reason, “I am not insane, most excellent Festus. What I am saying is true and reasonable” (26:25). Then he turned to Agrippa with a direct challenge: “King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do” (26:27). Agrippa replied, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?” Paul answered, “Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains” (26:28–29). After private consultation, the dignitaries concluded, “This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment... This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar” (26:31–32). As Maxwell writes, “Great leaders find a way to make their mess their message” (Sometimes You Win, Sometimes You Learn, p. 67).

WHAT THEY GOT: TRIALS BECAME TESTIMONIES

Opposition multiplied Paul’s platforms. A Jerusalem crowd heard his story in Hebrew. A Roman commander encountered a credible account of Christian faith. The Sanhedrin was forced to reckon with the resurrection. Governors Felix and Festus heard a clear, reasoned gospel; Felix heard it for two years in private conversation. King Agrippa and the city’s elite listened to a full proclamation of Christ. Even the Roman legal system became a stage to set precedent and secure protection for a growing movement. The gospel advanced as Paul’s Gentile mission gained official recognition, Roman intervention shielded him from mob violence, and persecution transformed into opportunity. Witness spread to audiences the early church could not have planned to reach.

Leadership grew under pressure. Paul displayed courage without compromise, strategic thinking in the use of rights and process, skill in recognizing opportunity within hostility, and relentless focus on his Rome calling. Theologically, Christianity demonstrated legal respectability and civic loyalty while maintaining spiritual integrity. It secured patient hearing in the empire’s courts, showed it was not mindless fanaticism, and proved compelling even to royalty. Paul’s evangelistic method shone: personal testimony as persuasive witness, cultural adaptation in language and tone, a logical case presented alongside divine revelation, and a direct call for personal decision. As Maxwell observes, “Every test is a testimony waiting to happen” (The Difference Maker, p. 89).

MAXWELL'S LEADERSHIP LAWS IN ACTION

The Law of the Test surfaced as trials revealed and developed Paul's character (The 21 Most Powerful Minutes in a Leader's Day, p. 156). The Law of Solid Ground held as integrity under interrogation built trust with soldiers, governors, and kings (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, ch. 6). The Law of Sacrifice framed his willingness to surrender freedom for the sake of the mission (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, ch. 18). The Law of Legacy appeared as his courtroom testimonies inspired generations of leaders to turn adversity into advance (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, ch. 21).

MODERN APPLICATION: THE TRIAL-TO-TESTIMONY MODEL

Transform opposition into opportunity by following Paul's pattern. First, stay calm under pressure. Refuse emotional reactions; treat criticism and crisis as God-given stages to witness. Speak the audience's language—relationally, culturally, and clearly—and establish credibility before presenting controversial truth. Second, present your case strategically. Stick to facts, invite evidence, and tell your story. Find common ground where you can—shared values, shared authorities—and then call for a decision rather than settling for discussion. Third, use legal and social systems wisely. Know your rights and exercise them ethically. Work within established channels, cultivate principled allies, and make long-term moves that align with the mission; Paul's appeal to Caesar served his Rome objective. Fourth, maintain mission focus. See the bigger picture in hardship, accept God's timing, and stay aligned with your ultimate assignment—your “Rome”—trusting the Lord's word, “You must also testify in Rome.”

When falsely accused in modern settings, expect character attacks, mission distortion, political manipulation, and legal challenges. Document your work carefully, respond strategically on selected platforms, and use every defense moment to point to Christ. Trust the process without idolizing it; let your integrity, patience, and clarity show. Keep the mission central so opposition does not define your agenda. Remember, “Your reputation is what people think you are; your character is what you really are” (The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader, p. 28).

Maximize your platforms for witness, as Paul did. Hostile crowds can become listening audiences when you answer wisely. Legal proceedings can reveal Christian character and truth under scrutiny. Private meetings with influential people can open surprising doors for the gospel. High-profile settings can multiply impact when humility and courage are held together.

YOUR WEEK 10 CHALLENGE

On Monday, conduct an opposition assessment by naming current accusations, criticisms, or resistance you face; discern what is true, what is misunderstanding, and where a strategic response could turn defense into witness. On Tuesday, recognize your platforms by listing every setting you have —meetings, online spaces, relationships, community roles—and consider how each can better serve gospel advancement, including neutral or even hostile spaces. On Wednesday, develop your story by writing your testimony as Paul did and practicing it in three, ten, and thirty minutes, adapting tone and emphasis for believers, skeptics, and antagonistic audiences. On Thursday, identify your “Roman citizenship”—the rights, resources, and positions you possess—and plan ethical ways to leverage them for kingdom purposes, including how to work more effectively within legal and social systems. On Friday, check your mission focus by reviewing current challenges in light of your calling; ask what long-term purpose God may be working and recommit to your “Rome.” On Saturday, strengthen character by naming where pressure exposes weakness, planning integrity-first responses to false accusations, and practicing calm, focused communication under critique. On Sunday, share testimony with your congregation, teaching them how God turns trials into platforms, encouraging them to see opposition as opportunity, and challenging them to use every arena they inhabit for witness.

Week 10 Goal: Transform at least one current challenge into a testimony opportunity that advances the gospel.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

When falsely accused, do you default to defensiveness or seize the moment for witness? Which hostile or neutral platforms could you redeem for your testimony? Are present difficulties advancing or distracting you from your ultimate calling? How does your behavior shift under criticism, and what does that reveal about character? Are you stewarding your rights, resources, and relationships strategically for kingdom advancement?

The Acts 22–26 formula is simple and strong: calm response plus strategic defense plus personal testimony plus mission focus equals trials becoming testimonies. Maxwell reminds us, “A person’s character is revealed not in great moments of crisis but in seemingly insignificant moments of choice” (The 15 Invaluable Laws of Growth, p. 134). Paul’s character, formed through years of small choices, enabled him to meet the ultimate test with grace, wisdom, and

unwavering commitment to his mission. The promise stands: if we endure like they endured—with calm responses, strategic thinking, powerful testimonies, and unwavering mission focus—we will see the same results. Every trial becomes a testimony. Every opposition becomes an opportunity. Every setback becomes a setup for greater gospel advance.

CHAPTER 10: ROME AND BEYOND

Acts 27–28 — “If We Finish Like They Did ...”

WHAT THEY FACED

Paul’s journey to Rome tested everything he had learned about leadership. A deadly storm, a shipwreck, a venomous snakebite, and two years of house arrest stood between him and his ultimate destination. Yet these obstacles carried him to the very heart of the empire where his mission would be completed. He faced a life-threatening voyage where the ship “was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind” (Acts 27:15). He bore leadership responsibility in crisis with 276 people depending on his guidance. He encountered the supernatural through divine interventions, miraculous healings, and protection in danger. He endured restricted ministry under guard that limited, but did not stop, his influence. The question was simple: Would he finish strong, or would the final obstacles defeat him just short of his goal? As Maxwell writes, “How you finish is more important than how you start” (Leadership Gold, p. 278).

WHAT THEY DID: TURN EVERY SETBACK INTO A SETUP

PHASE 1: LEADERSHIP DURING CRISIS (Acts 27:1–44)

Against Paul’s counsel, the centurion chose to sail during dangerous weather. Paul warned plainly, “I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also” (27:9–10). A hurricane-force Northeaster seized the ship; for fourteen days they saw neither sun nor stars, and “all hope of being saved was given up” (27:14–20). Then Paul stood and led. He acknowledged the ignored warning, offered God-grounded hope, and relayed a promise: “Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.’ So keep up your courage... it will happen just as he told me”

(27:23–25). He coupled faith with practical leadership—preventing sailors from deserting, urging everyone to eat, giving thanks to God publicly, and restoring confidence. The ship broke apart, but “everyone reached land safely” (27:44), exactly as God had said. As Maxwell’s Law of Navigation reminds us, “Anyone can steer the ship, but it takes a leader to chart the course” (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, p. 17).

PHASE 2: SUPERNATURAL ENCOUNTERS (Acts 28:1–10)

Washed ashore on Malta, they received “unusual kindness” from the islanders. While serving—gathering brushwood for the fire—a viper fastened on Paul’s hand. The islanders expected him to die, but he shook it into the fire and suffered no ill effects (28:3–6). Doors opened for ministry as Paul healed Publius’s father and then many others on the island. Honor replaced suspicion; the islanders supplied all that was needed for the journey (28:9–10). Paul’s servant posture and God’s supernatural power established credibility and created opportunity. As Maxwell notes, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care” (Winning with People, p. 67).

PHASE 3: THE ROME ARRIVAL (Acts 28:11–16)

After three months, they sailed on toward Rome. Believers traveled out to meet Paul at the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns; “at the sight of these people Paul thanked God and was encouraged” (28:15). In Rome, he lived under house arrest, guarded by a soldier, but with room to receive visitors (28:16). Reputation and relationships paved the way for influence despite chains.

PHASE 4: THE JEWISH OUTREACH (Acts 28:17–29)

Three days in, Paul summoned the local Jewish leaders, affirmed his loyalty to Israel’s hope, and explained his chains: “It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain” (28:20). They had heard no formal accusations from Judea but wanted to hear his views, acknowledging controversy surrounding “this sect.” Paul arranged a large meeting and, from morning till evening, explained the kingdom of God and tried to persuade them about Jesus from the Law and the Prophets (28:23). Responses were mixed; some believed, others would not. Citing Isaiah 6, Paul concluded, “God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!” (28:28).

PHASE 5: THE ROMAN MINISTRY (Acts 28:30–31)

For two full years, Paul welcomed all who came to him and “proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and

without hindrance!” He was restricted, but the gospel was not. As Maxwell writes, “Leadership is not about the position you hold but the influence you have” (The 360 Degree Leader, p. 89).

WHAT THEY GOT: FINISHING STRONG IN THE HEART OF THE EMPIRE

Paul reached Rome, the center of the known world, fulfilling a long-held calling and securing a strategic base for global expansion. His influence under house arrest was paradoxically enlarged; officials and ordinary people alike heard the message, and the Gentile mission advanced as Jewish rejection continued and Gentile responsiveness grew. His leadership legacy crystallized. He saved lives through decisive crisis leadership, demonstrated supernatural authority through divine protection and healings, and never wavered from his mission despite relentless obstacles. The church network now stretched from Jerusalem to Rome, with leaders like Timothy and Titus carrying the work, letters providing doctrinal foundations, and a missionary model others could reproduce.

Methodologically, the house-church strategy flourished. Intimate settings enabled deep conversation, ongoing access, and natural relational networks that multiplied the message. Two years of open-door teaching allowed Paul to address complex theological questions without time pressure. The prison-ministry model emerged as well: a captive audience of guards and officials heard the gospel; daily conduct validated the message; suffering authenticated the witness; and divine interventions underscored God’s power. As Maxwell observes, “Successful leaders see opportunity in every obstacle” (The 15 Invaluable Laws of Growth, p. 134).

MAXWELL’S LEADERSHIP LAWS IN ACTION

The Law of Legacy covered Paul’s final years as he established a ministry that outlasted his life (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, ch. 21). The Law of Victory appeared as he found ways to win under house arrest. The Law of Sacrifice defined his willingness to lay down personal freedom to complete his mission (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, ch. 18). The Law of the Test refined his character through every storm, snake, and cell (The 21 Most Powerful Minutes in a Leader’s Day, p. 156).

MODERN APPLICATION: THE FINISHING STRONG PRINCIPLES

Lead through storms with prophetic perspective and practical direction. Name realities honestly, offer God-centered hope, prevent panic, meet basic needs, lead by example, and refuse to abandon people when pressure mounts. Keep mission focus when everything tries to detour you—remember your calling, trust divine timing, use crises as testimonies, and expect God to keep His word. Turn restrictions into opportunities by embracing forced focus, leveraging intimate ministry, investing in sustained impact, and building strategic networks as people come and go. Cultivate the supernatural dimension of leadership through prayer, fasting, and spiritual discernment; follow God’s guidance into calculated risks; and pray for others as a public witness to God’s power. As Maxwell writes, “Spiritual leadership requires both natural ability and supernatural empowerment” (Spiritual Leadership, p. 89).

YOUR WEEK 11 CHALLENGE

On Monday, assess the storms you face and plan how to provide hope and practical direction so you can lead people through the crisis rather than around it. On Tuesday, review your mission focus and ask whether you are still headed toward your original calling; identify distractions and recommit to your “Rome.” On Wednesday, list current limitations—financial, organizational, health, or otherwise—and design ways to turn each constraint into an opportunity for influence. On Thursday, strengthen your supernatural dependence by scheduling regular times to seek God’s direction, and begin praying specifically for His interventions in your leadership. On Friday, plan your legacy by asking what would continue if your active ministry ended today; identify the core elements to preserve and transfer. On Saturday, evaluate your network by mapping your present sphere of influence and identifying key relationships that could multiply your impact. On Sunday, make a finishing-strong commitment; teach your people the importance of completing God’s calling, challenge them to stay faithful regardless of obstacles, and celebrate how God uses difficulties to advance His kingdom.

Week 11 Goal: Establish at least one system or relationship that will extend your ministry impact beyond your current limitations.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How do you respond when hope is gone—do you navigate or drift? What obstacles are threatening to derail your calling, and how will you persist? Are you treating limitations as barriers or as setups for new opportunities? Where are you relying more on human planning than on divine guidance? If your active

ministry ended unexpectedly, what would continue—and what needs to be built so it can?

The Acts 27–28 formula is clear: crisis leadership plus mission persistence plus supernatural dependence plus strategic networking equals finishing strong. Maxwell reminds us, “The secret to success is not starting strong but finishing strong” (Leadership Gold, p. 289). Paul’s final chapters show that great leaders don’t just begin well—they complete their mission despite obstacles, restrictions, and setbacks.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Storms reveal real leaders. Mission focus overcomes obstacles. Restrictions can become opportunities. Supernatural power validates leadership. Character under pressure builds credibility. Strategic relationships multiply impact. Finishing strong defines legacy.

THE ACTS COMPLETION CHECKLIST

Clarify your “Rome” and align daily work to your ultimate purpose. Prepare for crises so people look to you for hope and wise decisions. Maintain a living connection to God’s guidance and power. Build relationships and partnerships that multiply your influence and continue your work. Maximize opportunities within limits so effectiveness endures despite barriers. Create systems and train successors so the mission outlasts you. Guard your integrity under accusation and pressure so trials strengthen, not sour, your soul. As Maxwell challenges, “The test of a leader is not how well he or she functions in times of comfort and convenience, but how they lead under fire” (The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader, p. 67).

THE ROME PRINCIPLE

Rome represents the ultimate destination of your calling—completing what God assigned despite every storm Satan can send. Identify your Rome. Ask whether you are still on course. Name the storms that threaten to shipwreck your mission. Recognize who needs your leadership in the crisis. Decide now how you will finish—with a plan and a legacy that endures.

Paul’s Rome results were unmistakable. Geographically, he reached the empire’s center. Strategically, he established a base for global expansion. Theologically,

he completed a doctrinal foundation through his letters. In leadership, he developed a team that continued after his death. In legacy, he catalyzed a movement that changed world history. If you finish like Paul finished, your influence can extend far beyond anything you imagine today.

FINAL CHALLENGE: THE ACTS LEGACY

As this eleven-week journey closes, fix your eyes on Acts' final snapshot: "He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!" (Acts 28:31). Are you proclaiming God's kingdom or just building your own organization? Are you teaching about Jesus Christ or promoting yourself? Are you doing it with boldness, or holding back in fear? Are you pressing forward without hindrance, or letting obstacles stop you? The promise remains: "If we do what they did, we'll get what they got." They got a movement that transformed the world and continues to grow after two thousand years. They did what you have studied in these chapters—timeless principles, Spirit-empowered methods, courageous leadership. Will you apply what you've learned and join the ranks of leaders who change the world for Jesus Christ?

"Leadership is influence—nothing more, nothing less. The question is not whether you will influence someone. The question is how you will use the influence you have" (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, p. 11). Your Acts moment is now. Your Rome awaits. Your legacy begins today.

CONCLUSION: YOUR ACTS LEGACY

Congratulations. You have completed an eleven-week journey through the greatest leadership case study ever written. The early church started with nothing and changed everything. Now the continuing journey begins. Review these chapters regularly; principles require reinforcement. Share what you've learned; teaching others will deepen your own mastery. Apply one principle at a time; sequence beats scatter. Expect opposition; the same forces that opposed them will oppose you. Trust God's timing; their "sudden" breakthroughs were decades in the making. Build for legacy; construct systems and develop leaders that will outlast your personal involvement.

"If we do what they did, we'll get what they got." They followed Spirit-led, time-tested principles. They received fruit that outlived them. You serve the same God, empowered by the same Holy Spirit, carrying the same gospel. "The greatest leaders are not those who achieve the most for themselves, but those

who empower others to achieve beyond what they thought possible”
(Developing the Leaders Around You, p. 198). Your Acts legacy starts now. Your
Rome awaits. The world needs leaders who will do what they did to get what
they got. Will you be one of them?