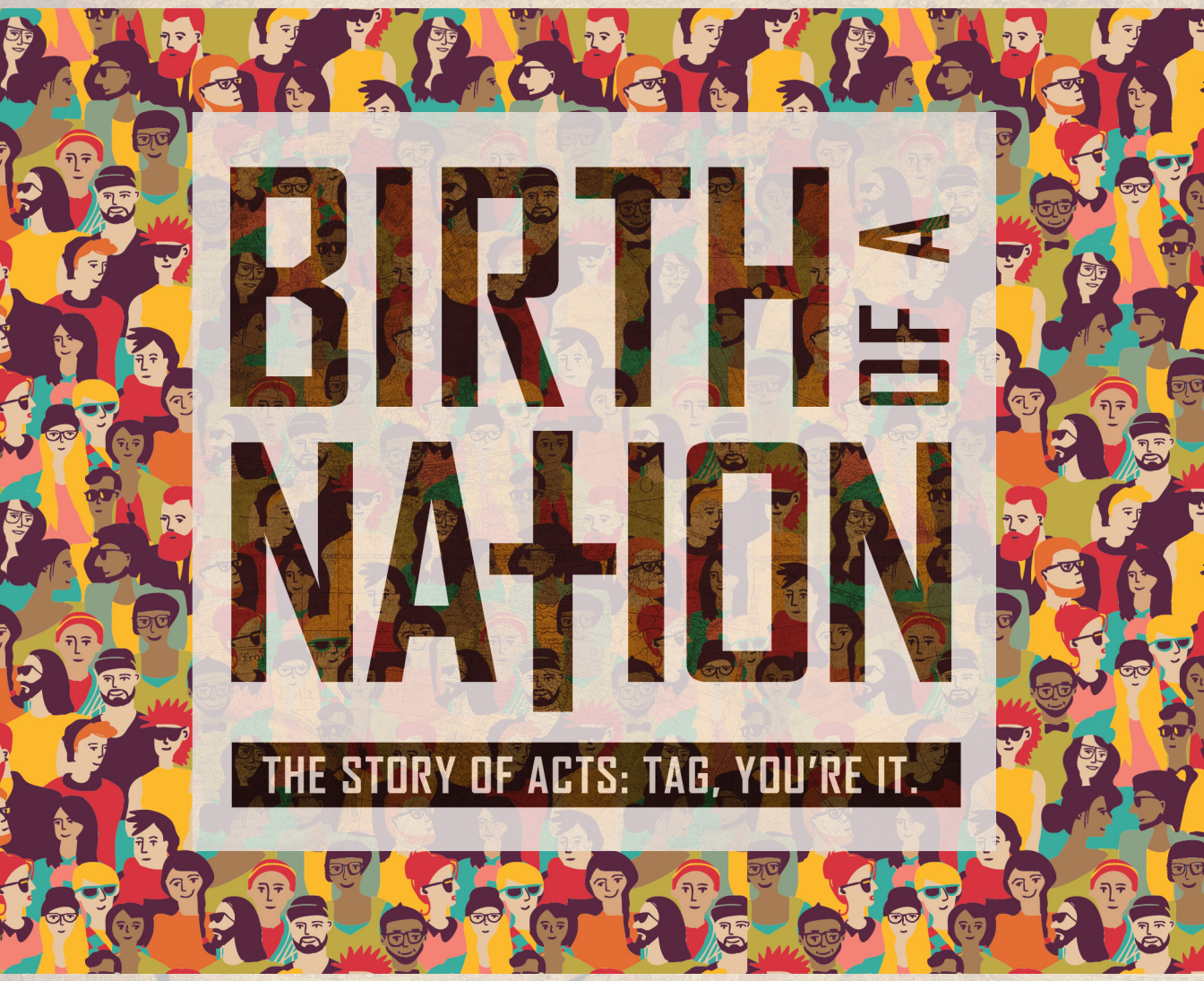
LIFE GROUP FIELD GUIDE



BIRTH OF A NATION

THE STORY OF ACTS: TAG, YOU'RE IT.

WEEK SEVEN

BEAUTIFUL GATE: PART ONE

BIRTH OF A NATION

THE STORY OF ACTS: TAG, YOU'RE IT.

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REPENT THEREFORE, AND TURN AGAIN, THAT YOUR SINS MAY BE BLOTTED OUT, THAT TIMES OF REFRESHING MAY COME FROM THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD, AND THAT HE MAY SEND THE CHRIST APPOINTED FOR YOU, JESUS.

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SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

ACTS 3:1-26 [ESV}

1 Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. **2** And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. **3** Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. **4** And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." **5** And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. **6** But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" **7** And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. **8** And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. 9And all the people saw him walking and praising God, **10** and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

Peter Speaks in Solomon's Portico

11 While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's. **12** And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? **13** The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. **14** But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be

granted to you, **15** and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. **16** And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

17 "And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. **18** But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. **19** Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, **20** that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, **21** whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. **22** Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. **23** And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.' **24** And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. **25** You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' **26** God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness."

BIG IDEA

WHETHER WE ARE BROKE, BROKEN, OR BOTH, THE GOSPEL OFFERS US FAR MORE HOPE THAN WE COULD EVER IMAGINE, BRINGING RELIEF FROM THE CRUEL BONDS OF SIN.

What Do You See

Look around you for a moment. What do you see? Maybe you see stuff or materials. Maybe you see something more. Like people whose layers rival that of onions. People are complicated. So many different experiences and motivations make up just some of what a person does on any given day. The human soul is as much a mystery to us as the cosmos. And perhaps more so. There's certainly a reason why we'd become those that could get so captivated in our own worlds of tasks and responsibilities that we might not look as much at a person. Yea, of course we'd still find the time to see people groups and trends of the day, but there's a significant difference between seeing a crowd and looking at just one person. When was the last time you directed your gaze at a total stranger? What did you see? How did you feel? What were you compelled to do next? It's interesting that even writing these words I can sense the tension of challenge and potential conflict that we often associate with such an encounter. But what if God could use these moments to breakthrough to us, them, and others also?

This passage begins as a somewhat normal day. Two guys on the way to the temple at about 3pm. While in route, they come upon a man that has been lame or handicapped since birth. His daily routine is being carried to the temple gates to ask for handouts of those going in and out. These particular temple gates are actually called Beautiful because they were made of Corinthian brass as opposed to the traditional gold or silver overlays. Their double doors also stood about 75 feet high. So as you might imagine, this was likely the most popular entrance. Prime real estate for someone hoping to receive handouts from others generosity and overall "pious" vibes. It's believed that because this man was more than forty years old (4:22) this was likely not the first time that these two men, Peter and John, saw the lame man. But on this specific day, they directed their gaze at him and asked him to do the same. The man undoubtedly looked up expecting to receive a handout of some sort. But then he hears something interesting. Peter, after truly seeing the lame man, says, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" This was a first I'm sure. Next Peter reaches out to the man and grabs his right hand and immediately his feet and ankle bones were made strong. He began leaping and entered the temple with them, praising God.

This is a truly beautiful moment that many of us would love to be apart of. However this moment begins with seemingly ordinary people taking or returning time out of their daily plans to invite God's

kingdom of love and grace into the everyday stuff of life. This all starts by Peter and John seeing an actual person. Not just the crowd or a need, but a human being just like them. And then deciding to get involved and reach out and grab the mans right hand. We can't reach who we can't see.

It's astonishing really. The man never even asked to be healed. He would've been satisfied to just receive the handout like every other day. The lame man wanted to be supported in his condition, while God purposed to change his condition completely. In many ways we aren't very far from his reality today. We segment portions of our week, our budget, maybe even our emotions or relationships, attempting to be or get more comfortable in a condition that perhaps God wants to transform. God knows that "changed people, change people."

IT IS NOT THE CHURCH'S BUSINESS IN THIS WORLD TO SIMPLY MAKE THE PRESENT CONDITION MORE BEARABLE; THE TASK OF THE CHURCH IS TO RELEASE HERE ON EARTH THE REDEMPTIVE WORK OF GOD IN CHRIST.

WILLIAM SANFORD LASOR

The man's response is pretty practical given his understanding of what happened to him. He responds by clinging to Peter and John, and entering the temple with them to worship, and leaping and praising God. It's no surprise that when people recognize that the guy leaping, walking, and praising is the same guy that was crippled laying by the gate asking for handouts, they were all amazed and of course ran over to find out more. I can imagine that the extent of the formerly lame man's explanation would've been something to the effect of "an hour ago, I couldn't walk, now I can run and jump! Praise God!" As miraculous as it was, the story at this point is still incomplete. There are still some unanswered questions. There had to be a Message to accompany this particular miracle. Peter saw the divine opportunity of the gathering crowd and seized the moment. He knew that the phenomenon of the miraculous in itself brought no one to Jesus, it merely aroused interest. Though they were greatly amazed, they weren't saved yet.

Who me?

The first thing that Peter makes abundantly clear is that he didn't do this great and miraculous thing. Jesus did. He says "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?" He leads with the truth that man can indeed take no credit for God's intervention in human moments and situations. It clarifies that neither him nor the formerly lame man can be accredited for this wondrous work. But instead the true wonder-worker here is Jesus the Christ!

In many cases, it'd be very easy to subtly receive a small amount of credit for our role in Jesus' mission. After all, it was Peter that decided to truly direct his gaze at the man right? It's here in this place our attitude of prayer and communion with God reveal our truest intent. For those who are satisfied with God, and who see everything as a gift from him to be used for him, it is not only necessary to render all glory and amazement back to God, it's easy. Peter exercises humility and worship as he speaks up to turn the hearts of the sons back to our true Father God. True conversion is the priority here. Peter knew the necessity of conversion, of God's work of bringing new life to us. Being a Christian is not "turning over a new leaf," it is being a new creation in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17).

In verse 13 and beyond really, we observe Peter contextualizing the Gospel for his audience to receive it's full weight and gravity. He starts by saying "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." This is directly connected to the heritage of the Jewish people and something they're very familiar with. Next, "the God of our fathers has glorified his servant Jesus." Again drawing from the old testament prophet Isaiah concerning the prophesy about the coming Messiah. In Isaiah 42, 52, and 53, there are powerful references to Jesus as God's servant. These passages of scripture are not lost on his hearers, and yet simultaneously assault some of the dominant ideas in this time about what the Messiah would truly do and be. Many of the Jews in Peter's day envisioned more of a mighty king than a servant. They're hope was that the coming Messiah would over throw the prevailing Roman government and restore the people of Israel to a place of prominence and authority. When Jesus arrives in the foretold capacity of Servant, helping and healing, instead of fighting and toppling governments, He was rejected. Peter paints a very clear picture of their denial of Jesus, and their determination to kill the "author of life" even when Pilate purposed to release Jesus. It was God who raised the one they decided to kill, and Peter and others stood as witnesses to this incredible truth. Notice that guy giving the message about denying Jesus happens to be a bit an expert on the subject. Before the book of Acts, one of the things Peter might be most known for, and certainly one of this glaring regrets would be denying Jesus three times. It's with this kind of experiential knowledge and passion that Peter speaks to the people. Not as one that's untouched by this act of denying the truth and person of Jesus as our one and only solution. Peter is living proof that "changed people, change people" and we are as well. Peter informs them the one whom they rejected is the very one through which this miracle was done. By faith in His name, this man was made strong, through the faith that is through or from Jesus.

SILVER AND GOLD SHOULDN'T HINDER THE WORK OF GOD

During the thirteenth century, the church was corrupted by secularism and materialism. Commentator Cornelius a Lapide tells a story of the day that Thomas Aquinas visited Pope Innocent II while he was counting a lot of money. The Pope pointed to the opulent surroundings and said to the monk, "We no longer have to say, silver and gold I do not have." Thomas replied, "But neither can you say, In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."

Excerpt from David Garlands, "Acts: Teach The Text"

It's Jesus that gave them the faith to believe in Jesus to believe that this man could and would be healed. This is why both Peter and you today can say of a fact that Jesus is the best thing to ever happen to us! It's Jesus that causes Peter and John to truly see this man. It's Jesus that gives them the truth and faith to freely admit what they lack (silver and gold) and freely give what He's given them (the gift of faith). Our lives aren't about us. No, this is not breaking news for many of us, but it is an echoing truth that resonants beyond our temporary seasons and good moods. While we're struggling, our lives are all about Jesus. When we're doing great, our lives are still all about Jesus!

Turn back to God

Peter doesn't offer a doom and gloom message void of hope and absolution. He ends his message with the invitation to turn away from our sins, weights, and conditions we've gotten used to. To abandon our selfish agendas for the lives that he's so generously given us. Peter spoke boldly to them about their sin, but not to make them feel bad. That wasn't the goal. The goal was to encourage them to repent and believe. Repentance does not merely describe being sorry, but describes the act of turning around. And as he used it in chapter two, here also Peter made repent a word of hope. He told them that they had done wrong; but that they could turn it around and become right with God.[1] Notice also the blessings of forgiveness. In verses 19-21 Peter mentions three benefits of genuine repentance: (1) total forgiveness, (2) spiritual refreshment, and (3) universal restoration. Regarding the first, he says that through repentance, "your sins may be wiped out". This is a beautiful word picture. Parchment was expensive, so sometimes scribes used acid-free ink as they wrote on it. The ink just lay on top of the parchment, so a person could take a wet sponge and wipe a message away, blotting it out. To put Peter's point to modern terms, imagine sitting there pondering the weight of your sin record and the certainty of coming judgment without having any hope of changing your sad reality. But then when you feel eaten by shame and fear, someone marches in and forever wipes the record of your wrongs off the board. Would that not make you soar in worship to the one wiping away your sin? That's what happened! Jesus Christ wiped out our wrongs. We have no guilt. We are under no condemnation. And as sure as Jesus wipes our sin away the moment we ask him to do so, He will wipe our tears away later (Rev 21:4).

But there's more. Through repentance you can enjoy spiritual refreshment (v 20). The language Peter uses here speaks of respite, rest, refreshment, or relief. It's a reminder that those who come to Jesus find rest. This is the good news to those striving and grappling for greatness or forgiveness of sins. Simply come to Jesus and find rest and refreshment for your weary souls. Jesus' actions on the cross set us free!

Finally Peter says if you will repent, then you will enjoy the hope of Christ restoring all things (v20-21). Paul spoke of the day in which our sufferings will give way to glory (Rom 8:18-37). Christ gives us hope to endure the difficulties of this life because He has given us the promise of glory to come. How terrible would it be to have hope only in this life? The gospel, however, offers an unshakable hope that our best days are yet to come.[1]

[1] Tony Merida, Exalting Jesus in Acts, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-centered exposition (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2017).

The ONE

It's interesting that the event that sparked the forming of the crowd started with the need of the one. Acts 2 ends with this exciting thriving new nation growing by the thousands. But Acts 3 begins with the church engaging the one. It starts with Peter and John directing their gaze at one person. Being honest with the one. Then reaching out to the one. And then something amazing happens. The moment with the one leads to moments with other ones. While our churches and ministries certainly have visions and plans to engage the many. We can never overlook to opportunity to be the hands and feet of Jesus to the ones that cross our path. There may be opportunities for us to see "ones" daily at work, school, stores, practices, or in our neighborhoods. There maybe "ones" in our family or circles of friends. Our Gospel experience can never be relegated to our spiritual to-do lists, and the emotional roller coaster attached with how much of the list we can get done in any given day. To limit our faith to that of fire insurance or just good works that make us feel better about ourselves is to lose sight of Jesus and how He sees the one. We have all been and are all at some point that ONE. The one that needs to be seen, acknowledged, and engaged as someone valuable and worthy of the Gospel. While it might cost you less to just give money and not look and see, Jesus can wonderfully expand the capacity of those whose dreams are trying to catch up with their hearts. God expands us and gives the opportunity to be great in this life so that he can encounter the ones at every level and sphere of society. The idea is that the character and competency of Jesus would still be seen today by his body, the Church. We are to live in a way where people think Jesus works at their jobs, goes to their school, and lives in their neighborhoods. So much so that they are then changed by Jesus, and start to be like Jesus, and do what Jesus did.

TAG, YOU'RE IT!

- **How are you challenged to look and see those around you?**
- **What does this text teach us about caring for both physical and spiritual needs?**
- **Is there any "one" that you can engage this week with the love of Jesus?**
- **Does this passage give you any ideas or inspiration for engaging those you may know?**
- **How can the people in your group/church/life encourage you to continue to find opportunities to see and reach out to the ones God places in your life?**