

# I M M E R S E

COMPANION GUIDE



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# Dear Saddleback Church Family,

I am truly convinced that 2025 will be one of the most significant years in our history. God is stirring a deep and courageous faith within his people, inviting us to pursue him with greater passion and expectation. He is calling us to seek his kingdom and his righteousness with all of our hearts.

Throughout Scripture, we witness the devastating consequences when humanity is left to its own devices. The world is heading toward greater darkness and is in desperate need of the true light—the light of Christ—that brings life to all (John 1:9). There is truly an urgency to the moment in which we live. Our students are facing unprecedented anxiety and depression, God's design for the family is under attack, and apart from a mighty move of God, church engagement (statistically speaking) is in a state of irreversible decline.

With all that being said, there has never been a better time to be a follower of Jesus.

**Crisis precedes renewal.**

That's why I am calling our entire church to seek the Lord fervently in the coming weeks—praying for his vision for our lives and for our future together as we commit to a regular habit of spending time in Scripture. Let's invite him to lead us and prepare us, both as individuals and as a church, so we can be ready for however he wants to use us to reach our generation.

In Joel 2, God calls his people to a **Sacred Assembly**, a gathering marked by worship, prayer, repentance, and the reading of his Word. In light of this, as a church we are going to call our leaders to a Sacred Assembly as we prepare for the next chapter of Saddleback Church. Across the globe, we are seeing sparks of spiritual awakening. What if God desires to ignite a fire within us that will impact the world? While we can't control God's timing, we can make ourselves ready for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

This is a moment for the church to boldly step into God's dreams for our future. We know that **unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain** (Psalm 127:1). That's why we are committing to immerse ourselves in God's Word, asking the Holy Spirit to purify our hearts, guide our steps, and prepare us for what's ahead.

Scripture says that the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him (2 Chronicles 16:9).

When God looks at Saddleback Church, we want him to see a people who, by his grace and through faith in Jesus, are consecrated, wholehearted, and ready. We are a people who say "YES" to Jesus and stand in the gap for our communities, for the next generation, and ultimately for every nation across the world.

I want to personally invite each of you to seek the Lord with us over the next four weeks—perhaps in ways you've never done before. The door to Jesus is wide open, and he is offering his grace and abundant favor to all who seek him. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to us through the Holy Spirit. I believe that as we seek him, we will find him—right here in our midst.

Let's press in together. Let's make ourselves ready for all that God has in store.

In Christ,  
**Pastor Andy**

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## How To Use This Guide

This Companion Guide is designed to accompany your journey through the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. You can do this journey in two ways, either in the **Immerse Bible – Luke & Acts**, or in your own copy of the Bible. During these 4 weeks we are inviting our church to join together in fasting, so we’ve provided a practical Invitation to Fast article to help you get started.

Luke and Acts are divided into 4 weeks. Each day’s reading will show you the corresponding pages in the Immerse Bible and the Scripture references. After each day’s reading, you’ll find a place to reflect with some questions to help you engage. We’ve also included some helpful resources for going deeper along the way.

Remember, the most important thing in reading Scripture is taking the time to pray and letting God change your heart through the Holy Spirit as you read his Word.

An Invitation to

# Fasting

# An Invitation to Fasting

If fasting is new to you, don't worry—there's no need to feel intimidated. It's not about perfection or meeting specific expectations; it's about taking a step closer to God and expressing our dependence on him. Fasting is an ancient biblical practice, used throughout church history and even embraced by teenagers and entire communities.

Fasting is more than just abstaining from food; it is a spiritual discipline that invites believers into a deeper relationship with God. In a very real sense, fasting brings our physical bodies into greater awareness and alignment with spiritual realities. In the Bible, fasting is often associated with prayer, repentance, humility, and seeking God's will. It is an invitation to focus the heart and mind on God, and it can serve as a means of spiritual renewal, self-reflection, and growth.

Over the next 4 weeks, we are inviting our whole church family to fast one meal a day while setting apart specific time each day for prayer.

## Key Biblical Principles of Fasting

- 1. Purpose of Fasting:** Fasting is not an end in itself, but is a means to a deeper connection with God. Throughout Scripture, fasting is often accompanied by prayer and a desire for God's guidance or intervention. In Matthew 6:16-18, Jesus teaches that fasting should be done with the right heart—not to be seen by others, but as a private act of devotion to God. The ultimate goal is to align one's heart and desires with God's will rather than to gain personal recognition.
- 2. Humility and Repentance:** Fasting in the Bible is frequently linked to repentance and a humble acknowledgment of one's need for God. In the Old Testament, fasting was often a response to sin, a way for people to express sorrow and seek God's forgiveness. In Joel 2:12-13, God says to the people, "Return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning." The act of fasting in this context signifies a turning away from self-reliance and a return to God's grace and mercy.
- 3. Spiritual Strength and Focus:** Fasting also serves as a means of spiritual strength. In Matthew 4:1-11, Jesus fasted for 40 days in the wilderness, preparing for his public ministry and overcoming the temptations of the enemy. Through fasting, a believer is able to remove distractions and gain clarity, allowing them to focus more fully on prayer, worship, and the Word of God. It is a way to intentionally shift attention from earthly concerns to heavenly priorities.
- 4. Spiritual Warfare:** In some cases, fasting is a way to engage in spiritual warfare. In Mark 9:29, Jesus speaks about a certain kind of demon that can only be cast out by

prayer and fasting. Fasting is seen as a tool to strengthen one's spiritual resolve and seek God's intervention in areas of intense spiritual struggle or need.

## The Opportunity Fasting Presents

Fasting offers believers a unique opportunity to grow spiritually. When a person fasts, they are invited to:

- **Strengthen Their Dependence on God:** Fasting helps break the illusion of self-sufficiency. By willingly choosing to forgo food or other comforts, the believer is reminded of their dependence on God for provision and strength.
- **Increase Sensitivity to God's Voice:** With fewer distractions, fasting creates space for the Holy Spirit to speak more clearly to a person's heart. It invites a deeper level of intimacy and listening to God's voice through prayer and reflection.
- **Experience God's Presence in New Ways:** Just as Jesus fasted to prepare for his ministry, fasting can help prepare the heart for God's work. It opens the door to new revelations, personal breakthroughs, and a renewed sense of God's presence.

## Factors to Consider When Fasting

1. **Motivation:** The Bible cautions against fasting for the wrong reasons, such as to appear spiritual or to manipulate God. It is essential to fast with humility, sincerely seeking God rather than personal gain (Matthew 6:16-18). Also on a practical note, when you fast you may not feel very spiritual, but instead you may feel easily agitated. You can count on feeling natural emotions that are normal when a person goes without food—that doesn't mean you are doing it wrong! It's just another opportunity to tell God you need him.
2. **Health and Practicality:** While fasting is a biblical practice, it's important to consider one's health and circumstances. Fasting from food, especially for extended periods of time, should be done cautiously. While the term "fasting" is limited to specifically abstaining from food, other alternatives, such as giving up other comforts (e.g., sugar, beverages besides water, social media, or entertainment), can also be beneficial for those who may have health issues.
3. **Spiritual Community:** Fasting is often a communal practice in the Bible. Though it can be done privately, fasting with others can deepen the experience and provide mutual support in seeking God's will.



## How to Fast

A biblical fast means to reduce or eliminate food intake for a specific period of time for the purpose of seeking God. The proper way to fast is to use the time you would have spent preparing, eating, and sharing a meal to feast on the Word and talk to the Lord. Think of it this way: How long would it take for you to have lunch with a friend? And what would you do when you had lunch together? You would eat and talk. Think of reading the Word as the eating part of the meal, and prayer as the conversational part of the meal. Take your time. Don't wolf down the meal. Read the Scriptures slowly. And don't rush the conversation. Instead, enjoy God's company. Give God your full attention, and tell him why you are fasting.

There are many ways to fast. You can abstain from food and liquids for one or more days. You can fast just from food. You can do a partial fast from certain foods (sometimes called a Daniel fast). If fasting is new for you, you might just try fasting from one meal. Fast during your lunch break and use that time to "feast" on the Lord. Go out to your car, sit at your desk, or go for a walk, but use that time to read your Bible and talk to God in prayer.

### A Special Note for Students

It's important for all of us to carefully consider our decision to fast. If you are a student, we are excited that you are journeying deeper with God and your church family! We encourage you to process your plans with your parents or guardians. After that conversation, continue that discussion with your life group leader or another trusted adult. Young bodies are developing and there are special considerations for those who may have a complicated relationship with food, or have a medical concern. Fasting can be a very powerful way to experience more of God and align your heart and mind with his purposes, so don't shy away from the idea just because you are young, but please make a careful decision together with your parents and spiritual leaders.

Fasting, ultimately, is a practice that invites believers into a deeper relationship with God, enabling them to grow spiritually, discern God's direction, and experience his power in new ways. It is a sacred opportunity to be transformed by God's presence.

As we join together in this ancient spiritual practice of fasting, may our hunger for food be overshadowed by an increasing hunger for more of God in our midst.

For additional resources on fasting, [click here](#) or scan the QR code at the front of this companion guide.

# WEEK 1: DAY 1

PAGES 1-6

LUKE 1:1 - 1:80

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## Scripture Verse

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## Reflection Questions

1. What is God inviting you to let go of?

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**2. What is God inviting you to receive?**

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**3. How is God inviting you to live differently?**

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# WEEK 1: DAY 2

PAGES 6-12

LUKE 2:1 - 4:13

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# WEEK 1: DAY 3

PAGES 13-19

LUKE 4:14 - 6:49

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# WEEK 1: DAY 4

PAGES 19-25

LUKE 7:1 - 8:56

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# WEEK 1: DAY 5

PAGES 25-31

LUKE 9:1 - 11:13

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Going Deeper:

# Prayer

# Going Deeper: Prayer

Prayer is simply an intentional effort to connect with God. There are many types of prayer, allowing freedom in how we engage with him. Prayer is rooted in relationship, so listening to God and receiving his Word is just as important as speaking to him. It's central to the kind of relationship the Father desires with his people. Jesus calls his house a "house of prayer," meaning he wants his people to live in constant, personal communication with him.

How we approach God depends on our understanding of his nature. He isn't distant, domineering, or transactional. The Father deeply desires a real relationship with us. Luke 11:1-13 is foundational in revealing the invitation prayer offers. Let's explore some practical ways to shape our understanding of prayer so we don't miss its profound gift.

## Key Biblical Principles of Prayer

- **God Desires Our Prayers:** What a remarkable truth. The God who created the world we live in and designed our bodies in his image wants us to approach him in prayer. Jesus said "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).
- **God Invites Us to Approach Confidently:** It's true that our sin separated us from God, but Jesus paid the penalty and offers complete forgiveness and restoration in our relationship with him. Because of the mercy given to us, we are invited to approach God with confidence (Hebrews 4:16). Our right standing with God is a gift of grace, not something we earn.
- **God Hears Our Prayers:** Scripture promises that when we pray in Jesus' name, he hears us (1 John 5:14-15). Even the thief on the cross was received by Jesus when he voiced one simple sentence: "Remember me when you come into your kingdom."
- **God Answers Our Prayers:** Life brings pain, unmet expectations, and unanswered questions. Though God's timing may differ from ours, he always answers (John 15:7). Our faith rests secure in him and his nature, not in a particular outcome. He will heal, restore, and fulfill his promises in perfect timing, even when we don't fully understand.
- **God Rewards Our Prayers:** The Lord not only desires us to pray, but he promises to reward us for seeking him. Matthew 6:6 says "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." The greatest reward is a deeper connection and intimacy with him.

## The Opportunity Prayer Presents

For many, prayer feels like a burden of duty or shame, as though God expects us to pray more. But what if we see prayer through the lens of delight, not duty? Imagine what might happen if God said “Yes” to your prayers today. What might we miss out on if we don’t pray?

Here are some opportunities prayer provides:

- **Know the Heart of God:** Prayer is a chance to understand the Father’s heart more deeply. Psalm 25:14 says, “The Lord confides in those who fear him, and he makes his covenant known to them.” Even in difficulty, we can bring our pain to God and receive his perspective, comfort, and hope.
- **Partner with God’s Kingdom Purposes:** God does things when we pray that he doesn’t when we don’t. All throughout Scripture, God partners with regular people to accomplish his will. Jesus even models this for us because he brings his sovereign authority to fruition on earth by asking the Father (see John 17, Romans 8:34, Psalm 2:8).
- **Receive Direction from Heaven:** Prayer brings guidance we might not otherwise have. In moments of decision, we can surrender our will to God, trusting that he will direct our steps through the Holy Spirit (Proverbs 3:5-6, Psalm 32:8-9).

## Factors to Consider About Prayer

- **Scripture is God’s Word:** When you read the Bible, you’re hearing from God. Learning to hear his voice through prayer is a lifelong journey, but the Holy Spirit helps guide us. When you seek him, you’ll find him (Jer. 29:13).
- **Pray Conversationally:** You don’t need fancy words or religious phrases. Prayer is the language of the heart, so just speak honestly. Talk to God the way you would talk to your best friend.
- **Prayer in Community is Important:** While individual prayer is vital, prayer in community fosters unity, love, and mission. The church is a house of prayer, and corporate prayer strengthens our faith.
- **Comparison Robs Our Joy:** In prayer, as in life, comparison leads to frustration. God wants to connect with YOU. Be honest and start where you are, not where you think you should be. He knows you better than you know yourself.

As we immerse ourselves in God's Word, let's also go deeper in prayer. Take a step forward in honesty with God, invite him to meet you and speak to you. Ask him to give you his perspective and love, both for yourself and toward others.

For additional resources on prayer, [click here](#) or scan the QR code at the front of your companion guide.

# WEEK 2: DAY 1

PAGES 31-37

LUKE 11:14 - 13:21

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# WEEK 2: DAY 2

PAGES 37-43

LUKE 13:22 - 17:10

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# WEEK 2: DAY 3

PAGES 43-47

LUKE 17:11 - 19:27

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# WEEK 2: DAY 4

PAGES 47-52

LUKE 19:28 - 21:38

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# WEEK 2: DAY 5

PAGES 52-59

LUKE 22:1 - 24:53

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Going Deeper:

# Repentance & Consecration

# Going Deeper: Repentance & Consecration

Repentance and consecration are big words that can sound intimidating, so let's take a look at what they are all about. Both of these are important aspects of learning to walk with Jesus, but they work in different ways. Repentance is about turning away from sin, a change of heart and mind that brings us back to God. Consecration, on the other hand, is about setting ourselves apart for God's purposes, giving ourselves wholly to him.

## Repentance: A Fresh Start with God

Repentance is more than just feeling sorry for our mistakes—it's a complete turnaround. In the Bible, it means changing your mind and direction, not just regretting your past. The Greek word "metanoia" means a change in thinking, but it's also about living differently because of that change.

In the book of Luke, as well as the other gospel accounts, Jesus calls people to repent because the kingdom of heaven is near. It's not just about regret, but is about embracing the new life Jesus offers. 1 John 1:9 promises that if we confess our sins, God will forgive and cleanse us. Repentance opens the door to forgiveness, restoration, and a fresh start.

But repentance doesn't stop there—it leads to spiritual renewal. It's an ongoing journey, not just a one-time event. Repentance helps us turn from sin, grow in holiness, and experience the freedom of forgiveness, no matter how far we've strayed.

## Consecration: Living Set Apart for God

Consecration and repentance go together, but they're not the same. Repentance is turning from sin, while consecration is fully dedicating yourself to God's purposes. In the Old Testament, consecration meant setting apart priests, altars, and offerings. In the New Testament, it's for all believers—living set-apart lives for God's glory.

Romans 12:1 sums it up: "Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship." Consecration means surrendering everything—time, talents, resources—to God's will. It's a choice to say, "God, use me for your kingdom."

It's not about rituals, but a heart posture of surrender. Every day, we dedicate our work, relationships, and resources to him, living with the awareness that every moment is a chance to serve God.

## Opportunities for Transformation and Growth

Through repentance, we experience God's forgiveness and are given a fresh start. No matter how far we've fallen, there's always an opportunity to return to God, to experience his forgiveness, and to walk in the freedom he offers. Every time we repent, we have the chance to realign our lives with God's purposes, to shed the weight of sin, and to embrace the freedom of his grace.

Consecration, on the other hand, is the opportunity to live intentionally for God's glory. It challenges us to go beyond a shallow faith and live out our commitment to him in every area of life. When we consecrate ourselves, we give God full access to our lives, allowing him to work through us in ways we may never have imagined. Consecration is an invitation to live with purpose and to dedicate everything we do to God's kingdom.

## Factors to Consider

When it comes to repentance and consecration, here are some important things to shape our thinking:

- 1. Authenticity is Essential:** Repentance isn't about superficial regret or guilt. It's a heartfelt change that leads to action. In 2 Corinthians 7:10, Paul writes, "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret." True repentance requires sincerity, not just a desire to avoid punishment. It's a longing to restore a broken relationship with God.
- 2. Ongoing Process:** Both repentance and consecration are ongoing. Repentance is not a one-time event, but a continuous process of turning from sin and turning toward God. Similarly, consecration is a lifestyle, not a one-off act. Every day is an opportunity to dedicate ourselves to God's purposes and to live in obedience to his call.
- 3. Grace and Forgiveness:** It's important to remember that repentance doesn't earn forgiveness; it's a response to God's grace. Ephesians 2:8-9 makes it clear that salvation is by grace through faith, not by our works. Repentance is simply the acknowledgment of our need for that grace.
- 4. Sacrifice and Surrender:** Consecration calls for sacrifice. We're called to offer our lives fully to God, which means there will be times we have to say no to our own desires and yes to his will. That sacrifice is always worth it, because it leads to a life that is fully aligned with God's purposes.

Repentance and consecration are both invitations to live differently, and they move us into a deeper, more wholehearted surrender to God. Repentance offers the freedom of forgiveness and restoration, while consecration invites us to live fully dedicated to God's

kingdom. Together, they provide pathways for deep transformation and renewal so we can experience the fullness of life that Jesus offers.

Is there anything you would like to repent from today? Any sin or aspect of your life that is preventing you from living in freedom with Jesus?

What step can you take today to move toward greater surrender to God's purposes for your life? What might you voluntarily sacrifice to make more dedicated space for God?

For additional resources on repentance and consecration, [click here](#) or scan the QR code at the front of your companion guide.

# WEEK 3: DAY 1

PAGES 61-66

ACTS 1:1 - 4:4

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# WEEK 3: DAY 2

**PAGES 66-70**

**ACTS 4:5 – 6:7**

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# WEEK 3: DAY 3

PAGES 70-74

ACTS 6:8 – 8:3

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**3. How is God inviting you to live differently?**

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**Prayer**

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# WEEK 3: DAY 4

PAGES 74-77

ACTS 8:4 - 9:31

Often the first step in listening to God through his Word is slowing down to give him time to speak. Take a moment and ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate or highlight a verse or phrase from today's reading and write it here. Any verse will work because all of Scripture is God's word!

## Scripture Verse

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## Reflection Questions

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**Prayer**

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# WEEK 3: DAY 5

PAGES 77-82

ACTS 9:32 - 12:24

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Going Deeper:

# The Holy Spirit



# Going Deeper: The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, fully God, and equal to the Father and the Son. He's not just a feeling or an abstract idea; he's a person who is with us every day—guiding, comforting, and empowering us. The Holy Spirit has always been the driving force behind spiritual renewal, from the early church in Acts to revivals that changed history. The Holy Spirit is available to each of us, not just a select few.

In Acts 1:4-5, Jesus promised that after he ascended, the Holy Spirit would come. The Day of Pentecost fulfilled that promise, and from that moment, everything changed. The early church was ignited by the Holy Spirit, empowering the message of Jesus across the world. The very presence of God now dwells in the hearts of ordinary men and women. The same Holy Spirit that empowered the church then is ready to move in your life today!

Corrie Ten Boom once said, *“Trying to do the Lord’s work in your own strength is the most confusing, exhausting, and tedious of all work. But when you are filled with the Holy Spirit, the ministry of Jesus just flows out of you.”* When we rely on the Holy Spirit, we tap into a divine power that makes the work of God fruitful and life-giving.

## The Holy Spirit as Helper and Advocate

Jesus tells us in John 14:26 that the Holy Spirit is our helper and advocate. He's our personal guide, always present, teaching, reminding, and empowering us. The Holy Spirit strengthens us when we're weak, and when we don't know how to pray, he intercedes on our behalf. You are never alone; he's always with you, guiding, supporting, and leading you through every moment of life.

## The Holy Spirit Guides Us

Romans 8:5-6 teaches us that when we're controlled by the Holy Spirit, we begin to think and live in ways that please God. He shows us the difference between living for temporary, worldly desires and pursuing God's eternal purposes. And here's the beauty of it: he doesn't condemn us when we go off track. Instead, he gently redirects us, bringing us back to the path that leads to life and peace. When we live by the Spirit, we experience freedom, joy, and a peace the world can't offer.

## The Fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5:22-23 says that the Holy Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. This isn't about trying harder or pretending to be someone we're not—it's about allowing the Spirit to work in and through us. When we yield our lives to him, these qualities flow naturally. And when people see this kind of transformation in us, they'll want to know what makes us different. The Holy Spirit is the secret to living a life that points others to God.

## Opportunities the Holy Spirit Presents

The Holy Spirit doesn't just help us personally; he empowers us to fulfill God's mission on earth.

- **Empowerment for Ministry**

Sharing the Gospel can feel intimidating, but Acts 1:8 reminds us that when the Holy Spirit comes upon us, we receive power to boldly declare the good news. This isn't just for the early disciples; it's for every believer. The Holy Spirit gives us courage and clarity to speak the truth of Jesus, even in challenging situations.

- **Gifts to Build Up the Church**

In Acts 2:17, God promises to pour out his Spirit, and that his people will dream dreams and see visions. This isn't just a promise for the early church—it's for us today. When we invite the Holy Spirit into our lives, he imparts special gifts to the people of God to edify and strengthen one another, and bear lasting fruit.

- **Strength for Our Struggles**

Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit's power when he emerged from the wilderness in Luke 4:14. In the same way, the Holy Spirit strengthens us in our struggles. We all face challenges, but we don't have to face them alone. The Holy Spirit equips us with everything we need to stand firm even in the toughest times.

## Key Considerations for Inviting the Holy Spirit into Our Lives

- **Start with Prayer**

Prayer is the gateway for the Holy Spirit to work in our lives. It's in prayer that we invite him to lead, guide, and reveal God's will to us.

- **Expect Life Change**

When we invite the Holy Spirit in, we can expect profound transformation over time. He doesn't just tweak our lives; he changes us from the inside out. This transformation impacts not only ourselves, but those around us as well.

- **Strive for Unity**

The Holy Spirit moves powerfully when believers are united in prayer and mission. There's strength in unity, and when we come together in one accord, God does extraordinary things.

- **Be Sensitive to the Spirit**

The Holy Spirit often nudges us in quiet, subtle ways. It's essential to stay tuned to his voice, be aware of those gentle promptings, and step out in faith, even when it's unexpected.

The Holy Spirit is here, active and ready to move in your heart. The more we surrender and consecrate our lives to Jesus, the more we will experience the power of God filling and flowing through us. The Holy Spirit isn't as much a power to be wielded as he is a person to be yielded to. Practice making intentional effort to be attentive to the promptings and leadership of the Spirit in your heart, and you'll discover more and more the gift he truly is in every area of your life. You'll also be able to extend the love and power of Jesus to those around you in supernatural ways.

For additional resources about the Holy Spirit, [click here](#) or scan the QR code at the front of your companion guide.

# WEEK 4: DAY 1

PAGES 82-89

ACTS 12:25 - 16:5

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# WEEK 4: DAY 2

PAGES 89-94

ACTS 16:6 - 19:20

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# WEEK 4: DAY 3

PAGES 95-101

ACTS 19:21 - 22:29

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# WEEK 4: DAY 4

PAGES 101-107

ACTS 22:30 – 26:32

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# WEEK 4: DAY 5

PAGES 107-110

ACTS 27:1 - 28:31

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# An Invitation to Return

## **We Did It!**

Let's take a moment to celebrate the completion of our Immerse reading plan! Stacie and I are so proud of you and honored to walk this journey together of going deeper in our walk with Jesus. We've invested 4 weeks in building a habit of seeking the Lord in prayer, fasting and reading the Word. This is a victory worth celebrating!

And here's the thing: we're just getting started.

In the introduction letter of this guide we mentioned the book of Joel and the idea of a Sacred Assembly, a sincere gathering of the people of God to come back to him. **I believe God is also awakening us to a fresh urgency, a call to return to our first love.**

If you read the opening chapters of Joel, you'll see a stark picture of devastation—the kind that comes when a people turn their backs on God. The locusts, the invading armies—they're all metaphors for the spiritual battles we face. In the New Testament, Paul reminds us that our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the powers and principalities of darkness. When we start offering our hearts to lesser things, when we let other idols take our attention, we're opening ourselves up to the enemy's attack. The Sacred Assembly in the book of Joel was, first of all, a call to the spiritual leaders to recognize the urgency of the moment. Business as usual was not working, and it was a sounding of the alarm to return to the Lord wholeheartedly.

Looking at our society today, we see evidence of how the enemy is coming after our children, our homes, and our communities. And as my friend Jon Tyson puts it, "The clock determines the play." Meaning, when the game's on the line—when time is running out—you've got to give it everything you've got. The moment requires urgency, and strategy has to change.

We believe there's a stirring happening across the globe. It seems there are spotfires of renewal in many places. People are hungry for prayer, for the presence of God, and the Word of God. There seems to be a growing awareness of how much we need him. I want to invite you into a greater posture of seeking the Lord in this next season for your own life and for our church and surrounding communities.

## **Now is the time.**

Now is the time to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. We will put aside any idol in our lives that is taking our affections and our attention from the one true King. The Lord is our Shepherd, and in him, we lack nothing.

Now is the time to strengthen our marriages and families according to God's design, with Jesus as the central organizing principle of our homes. To stand in the gap for the next generation and lead them to know their identity in Jesus and how deeply they are loved by God.

Now is the time to speak the name of Jesus to those around us who are lost, hurting, and desperate for the Good News. To show love, kindness, and compassion to those who need it most—those who are marginalized, forgotten, or overlooked.

Now is the time to fix our eyes on Jesus and call on his name to fulfill **his dreams** for our lives, our homes, our church, and our communities.

Please join us in prayer as we gather our leaders for the Return Gathering to seek the Lord over the next few days. I want to invite you to join us next weekend as we engage our whole church in launching into our Dream Now multi-year vision initiative. This is a significant moment for us as a church to step into what God wants to do in the future.

Come, Lord. Do what only you can do!

**Pastor Andy**







**SADDLEBACK  
CHURCH**