



NG Study Guide: Acts 1:12-26 “Seeking God’s will” [6.26.22]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. *Leader note: Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

The Study

Thesis: It’s easy for those who believe in God to approach Christianity, church, and their faith in a very *passive* way. However, followers of Jesus will find the greatest fulfillment when we *actively* seek to know God and act in alignment with His will.

Subject: Matthias appointed as disciple

Object: Seek God’s will

1. Followers of Jesus seek God through prayer [12-14]

¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey. ¹³ And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. ¹⁴ These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

- **Context:** They returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet (or Mount of Olives) [1:12]. In Acts 1:4-11 we see that the disciples were with Jesus, witnessed His ascension, and are now returning to Jerusalem [1:12] to remain there and “wait for the Promise of the Father” [1:4]. Pastor Chris discussed last week then challenges of waiting on God, but the significance of obedience. We’re told that they returned to Jerusalem, which was about a Sabbath day’s journey [12]. This is estimated to be approximately 0.7 miles, or the allotted amount of steps one could take on the Sabbath in accordance with the Law. Now this reference to the Mount of Olives does not contradict Luke’s location of the ascension mentioned in His gospel in Luke 24:50, where he states that it occurred in the region of Bethany. Bethany was a city, and the region actually falls on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. They returned to Jerusalem, enter into the upper room [13] (this is likely the same room and reference to the place where they had the Last Supper), and wait.

a. The disciples pray and supplicate [14]

- Prayer is such a major theme and task of importance that is modeled all throughout the book of Acts. Jesus consistently teaches prayer [Matt. 6, John 17] and models prayer [*“But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”* – Luke 5:16]. And doesn’t this makes sense? Jesus constantly teaches on and models prayer, and as soon as the disciples are without Him, they pray and supplicate. It’s what He taught, it’s what he showed, so their natural reaction is to seek God through prayer.

- Supplication – “the action of asking or begging for something earnestly or humbly.” The disciples are asking God what they are supposed to do. They’ve been told by Jesus to wait, and now they are unsure what they are supposed to do. So they present their requests before God. They supplicate. They ask God for things.

b. The disciples pray in one accord [14]

- Prayer seen throughout the book of Acts is frequently modeled in group settings, and is part of the DNA of the Church. They gathered together, and prayer with one another. This was common practice for them. For many of us today the thought of praying out loud together in a group is a very uncomfortable one. Societally speaking, we've individualized and privatized our relationship with God to the extent that many other people don't really know anything about where we are at spiritually. As we see the church on the verge or really taking off, we have to realize that we are part of something that is bigger than ourselves. One of the ways that we grow as followers of Jesus is simply by praying *with one another*. There is this comparison trap that we often find ourselves in: "well I don't have the words all polished and clean like so and so... I don't know what I'm supposed to say out loud... what if I say the wrong things... I don't even know if what I want to pray for is legit..." This is a model for us. I know it seems so basic to say that as followers of Jesus we need to pray, but this should be such an essential part of our Christian life. In the same way that it was the default action for the disciples, it should be the default action in our lives as well. We seek God through prayer. We seek to know God through prayer. We seek better understand God's plan through prayer.

2. Followers of Jesus seek God's direction [15-26]

¹⁵ *And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said,* ¹⁶ *"Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; ¹⁷for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry."* ¹⁸ *(Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. ¹⁹And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.)* ²⁰ *"For it is written in the Book of Psalms: 'Let his dwelling place be desolate, And let no one live in it'; and, 'Let another take his office.'* ²¹ *"Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²²beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection."*

²³ *And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴And they prayed and said, "You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen ²⁵to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place."* ²⁶ *And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.*

a. Peter demonstrates his growth [15]

The last two times we saw Peter were not his ministry highlights: Peter denies Jesus 3 times [Luke 22:54-62]; Jesus' rebuke and command to follow Him [Jn. 21:15-19]. We see this transformative process in the life and ministry of Peter. Peter has stepped up as a leader of the disciples during this time. With the absence of Jesus, he stands up to address the 120 disciples who were gathered together [15]. It is clear that he was seeking God's will and direction.

As followers of Jesus, we will make mistakes. Paul affirms that [Rom. 7:15], we will not be made perfect until we meet Jesus face to face. However, we cannot allow those mistakes to pull us away from God and His will, but rather motivate us to grow as His disciples by continuing to live obediently. It's so important for us, in our shortcomings and failures, to *seek the will of God*. We cannot allow our failures to hold us back from actively living out what God is calling us. I can assure you that His plan is not for your sin and failures to inhibit you from growing, making an impact, and being used by God for His Kingdom. Romans 8:1 "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." We see this transformative restoration in Peter's life, and that is exactly what God desires for you. If we don't grow through our failures, we will always fail to grow.

b. Judas sought his own gain [16-19]

We are told that the gruesome death of Judas [18-19] was the fulfillment of the prophecy given in the book of Psalms [Ps. 69:25]. And we see that the field was known as the 'Field of Blood' – this is likely in two parts because it was purchased the reward money for the innocent blood of Jesus, but also because it was where the guilty blood of Judas was spilled. There is a bit of understanding that we need to make sense of Matthew 27:3-10

and Acts 1:18-19. The field was likely purchased not by Judas, but in Judas' name with the money that he threw on the floor in the temple [Matt. 27:5]. Matthew 27 describes Judas as being hanged, and Acts 1 describes what could have happened to his body after that hanging.

It's clear that Judas in his selfish actions. He had been brought in as one of the 12, and obtained a part in the ministry of Jesus [17]. He became a guide to those who arrested Jesus [16]. He was seeking his own will above the direction and will of God. He lost sight of God's will and pursued his own will. We are unsure if that was a ploy to get in with the religious elites or it could've been for the financial gain (though it was relatively limited). Either way, he was seeking His own will and desires above the will of God.

c. Matthias is appointed [20-26]

- The requirement for the replacement disciple was that they were with Jesus from the time he was baptized until the time he was taken up [21-22]. Justus and Matthias were deemed the two most qualified individuals [23]. We are unsure if this was strictly based on their presence throughout the ministry of Jesus or based on their skillset of fulfilling the financial duties that Judas helped.

- They then pray again [24]. And syntactically speaking, it appears that as they begin their prayer with "You, O Lord" [24]. This is a prayer to Jesus, not to the Father, and they state that they believe that Jesus has already (past-tense) chosen the 12th Disciple. Therefore, they cast lots to try to discern Jesus' plan.

- What's important for us to see is that the disciples, with Peter's leadership were seeking the Lord's will and direction, and were striving to be obedient to the Scriptures.

2 positions on the appointing of Matthias:

1. The disciples jumped the gun. They had just been instructed to "wait for the Promise of the Father" [1:4]. Peter appears to have jumped the gun, because they appointed Matthias [1:25] prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit [2:4]. The one who would be of greater value than Jesus Himself [Jn. 16:7], was coming to help them. However, they jumped the gun and appointed Matthias. That is why Matthias is never mentioned again in the New Testament. And God appoints the apostle that He actually wanted them to wait for by sending Jesus to intervene in Saul's life on the road to Damascus. Functionally speaking, Saul/Paul then is established as the 12th apostle and given apostolic authority (or power to perform miracles). He was far more influential and instrumental in the establishment of the Church. Rev. 21:14 states the idea of the New Jerusalem being established on the foundation of the 12 apostles. This view holds that Paul, not Matthias would be included. They shouldn't have selected by casting lots [26] because that was a method of discernment that was used throughout the Old Testament to discern God's will, but wasn't used during the ministry of Christ.

2. The disciples didn't jump the gun, and in obedience and accordance with God's plan laid out in Ps. 109:8, they replaced Judas with Matthias. According to vs. 21-22, they were under the impression that the 12th disciples had to be someone who had witnessed the entirety of Jesus' ministry. So they selected two men, of the 120 that Paul was addressing who had been with them since the baptism of Christ. They cast lots because that was a method of discernment described in the Scriptures to use to decipher God's will [Lv. 16:8, Nu. 26:55, Jon. 1:7-8]. The casting of lots was valued because "the lot is cast into the lap, but every decision is from the Lord" [Pr. 16:33]. These were two equally qualified men, and the Lord had already chosen. (This isn't seen as gambling, sinful, or jumping the gun because this is the last time we see the use of casting lots in the New Testament, meaningful it was no longer necessary after the coming of the Holy Spirit.) There is no rebuke in the Bible that these men acted in contrast to what God was asking them to do.

For those that read and interpret this passage with the understanding that the disciples jumped the gun, it's important for us as followers of Jesus today to hold the understanding that God calls us to wait [1:4] and in the waiting we must seek His will.

For those that read and interpret this passage with the understanding that the disciples acted in accordance with God's will, it's important to understand that they devoted themselves to prayer. They sought God's wisdom through supplication (asking God to meet their needs), and acted in accordance to what they'd seen modeled for them in Scripture by casting lots. They needed to seek the will of the Father.

In either interpretation, our take away as followers of Jesus is that we *must* be seeking the will of God. This is not a process that can be neglected. It's essential for us as His followers to go before God in all circumstances to try to gain an understanding of what He's calling us to do. When Jesus teaches His disciples to pray He instructs them to pray, "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" [Matt. 6:10]. This was a daily

prayer that Jesus was giving to His disciples (give us this day our daily bread [Matt. 6:11]). Therefore, we must seek God's will for our lives on a daily basis.

Study Guide Qs

Q1. What are some of the benefits believers experience when they pray together?

Q2. Peter demonstrated his growth after his failures. Why is it difficult to believe that God can restore and use His people after stumbling?

Q3. How can believers strive to discover God's will and plan in their lives? Are there any practices you've found to be effective?

Q4. What are some ways you can grow in your prayer life to better seek God and His will?

"Digging Deeper" (optional or alternative study)

1. Here is additional insights on Acts 1:

https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Act/Act-1.cfm

2. Here is some commentary on Matthias:

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Matthias-in-the-Bible.html>

Love your neighbors (inside + outside the group) better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationships with their neighbors inside or outside the group?

2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbors inside or outside the group?

Disciples who make disciples:

1. Who would like to share how they recently sought to make disciples?

2. Here is a disciple making idea to consider for the weeks ahead:

Offer to prayer *with someone this week.*

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

1. Seek to involve as many group participants as possible. A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.

2. Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.

3. The "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities. As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.

4. Every time you meet consider asking:

a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing? If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.