



MISSIONAL COMMUNITY

SESSION GOALS.

MAIN IDEA: Together, we can overcome obstacles by the power of the Holy Spirit and accomplish God's mission on Earth.

Head Change: To know that, as God's people, we will encounter external and internal hindrances to our Kingdom-building work.

Heart Change: To celebrate that we need not focus on the obstacles, but rather on the grace and power God supplies, which allow us to live victoriously and for His purposes.

Life Change: To cultivate in our communities, for such a time as this, undivided hearts, undistracted eyes, and unashamed egos.

OPEN

What is the most challenging or most frustrating obstacle you've had to overcome this week? Were you partly to blame for creating the obstacle, or was it a result of circumstances beyond your control? Could you resolve it yourself, or did you resolve it with the help of someone else?

Life is full of bumps in the road. The same goes for living in community with other believers as we carry out God's mission. Thankfully, Anne Zaki reminds us in this session that our great God is infinitely bigger than any obstacle threatening to hinder our progress.

VIEW

As you watch, write down how Anne answers these questions.

What is the last word of the book of Acts?

List some of the external and internal hindrances faced by the early church.

What three traits characterized the believers in the book of Acts, allowing them to overcome obstacles to the spread of the gospel?

Show SESSION #4: *Missional Community* (10 minutes)

REVIEW

Anne reflects on people saying things like, "I wish the church today could be more like the church in Acts!" The last word of the book of Acts, in the original Greek, is *unhindered*. Perhaps because of this we romanticize the early church, as if it functioned perfectly and was free of trouble. How does your perception of the church in Acts differ from the realities of your local church community?

Of course, the truth is that the early church faced external hindrances like persecution, execution, misunderstandings, and natural disasters. Has your church faced any of these, or other, external hindrances? If so, how did your community cope with these complications?

The believers in the book of Acts also faced internal hindrances, like open rebellion, denial of the Holy Spirit, discrimination, legalistic prejudice, disappointment in leadership, the undermining of calling and authority, and hardhearted stubbornness. Has your church had to deal with any of these internal hindrances? If so, how were the situations resolved?

Anne points out that not much has changed. In the church today, we suffer from similar external hindrances (persecution, people divinizing certain celebrity leaders while demonizing others, and so on) and internal hindrances (like arguments amongst leaders and discrimination). Would you describe the work of your church community as *unhindered*? Why, or why not?

That last Greek word in the book of Acts isn't there to deny the hindrances endured by the early church. Rather, it's there to celebrate how this missional community overcame all these hindrances. Anne offers the analogy of watching an Olympic obstacle course race. We don't watch to observe how high the hurdles are, or how many of them there are, or what color they are. We don't watch for the sake of the obstacles. We watch for the sake of the athletes. We watch to witness the beauty and the strength of a disciplined human body, leaping over hurdles. Talk about how you've witnessed the astonishing beauty of people in your community rising above challenges, barriers, and blatant opposition to fulfill the call of God upon their lives. What have you learned from these individuals? How has their example inspired you to tackle the obstacles in your path with greater courage?

The early church leapt over their external and internal hindrances by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the book of Acts we can trace three ways in which they determined to faithfully and eternally impact the world: they had an undivided heart, undistracted eyes, and an unashamed ego. That means, they continually focused on God alone as their chief priority and the only object of their worship; they kept their eyes on the prize, leaving their past behind, ignoring the temptations ahead, and testifying to God's grace; and they lived wholeheartedly glad to be identified with Christ, never embarrassed by their faith and the choices associated with it. What typically distracts you from single-minded focus on God? What's your next step, to eliminate this distraction? Do you ever feel disqualified from serving God effectively because of your past? What does God say about your past?

Anne says, "I don't know what your context is, or what gifts and fears you have, but I know that you are part of your missional community for such a time as this. I also know that God doesn't bench people. There is plenty of harvest and the laborers are few. We are all needed, young and old, men and women, new believers and old Christians. We are all needed." Do you feel as if there's space for you, as a laborer gathering the harvest? Why, or why not? What kinds of ideas and opportunities is God giving you to spread His light and life, unhindered?

BIBLE EXPLORATION

Read Ecclesiastes 4:9–12. If you were asked to write the script for a commercial advertising community, how might you paraphrase these verses as part of your sales pitch?

Paul writes, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:2) Whose burden is God prompting you to bear? How might bearing someone's burden communicate the gospel to a watching world?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:14. This past week, who have you encouraged or strengthened? Which aspects of living in community regularly require you to exercise patience? How is Jesus growing you and changing you—making you more like Himself—through this situation?

Read 1 John 1:7 and Hebrews 10:24–25. If a colleague asks you why you often hang out with your church friends, how might you use the truth of these verses to explain that your faith is inextricably linked to Christian community?

LAST WORD

We worship a God who empowers us through the Holy Spirit to jump over our obstacles as an undivided, undistracted and unashamed missional community. Be encouraged: the Word of God will be preached and His kingdom will advance unhindered. May you embrace the training of leaping over your hindrances as a missional community, bolstered by the assurance that the sovereign Lord is your strength, making your feet like the feet of a deer and enabling you to tread on the heights (Habakuk 3:19).

DEEPER WALK

Select at least one activity below to complete before watching the next session.

Read: Read Romans 12:16, 1 Corinthians 1:10, and 1 Corinthians 12:25–27 in a few different Bible translations. What is God saying to you about arrogance and humility, unity and division, in any of your relationships?

Write: Divide a page of your journal into two columns labeled *external hindrances* and *internal hindrances*. List any that come to mind. Which list is longer? What's your next step as you seek to overcome these challenges in God's strength?

Pray: Write out a prayer of thanks that God's purposes can't be thwarted (Job 42:2) and that He equips and empowers you as you obey His call on your life.