



Portable Bible Schools

# “Acts: God’s Training Manual

For Today’s Church”

By Jim Poitras

## How It All Began

At the **School of Missions** in 1994 I listened intently as **Rev. G. A. Tracy**, the newly appointed **Coordinator of Overseas Ministries** (then **Director of Education/AIM**) expressed his burden for training. His suggestion that full scale theological education is taking so much time (usually three years), and is not getting the job of world evangelism done, caught me in a mixture of emotional responses. One part of me wanted to emphatically reject what he was saying, having been involved in full-time Bible College work for eleven years. Another part of me realized that what he was saying possessed merit for careful pondering. With the world population exploding and the supply of trained pastors dwindling in sight of the unmet demand, something must be done to train more disciples in a shorter time period. In congregations around the world we have an abundant labor force that can be mobilized to meet the discipling needs of a ripened harvest. I still maintain that full-time training for pastors and national church leadership are necessary for a solid church in any country but also know that the Body of Christ has the potential of **“turning the world upside down.”** (Acts 17:6)

## Discipleship: The Lost Priority of the Great Commission

In the **“Great Commission”**, Jesus placed **“discipleship”** at the top of the **“List of Things To Do Today”** for the church. However, like many **“To Do”** lists, we have pushed what needs to be done today until a distant tomorrow that never really arrives. The real priority slips further down on the list each day. Thus, the church lacks the power needed to transform lives. We must again focus on our central purpose of making disciples. Elton Trueblood wrote, **“The test of the vitality of a religion can be seen in its impact on culture.”**

**Are we actually impacting our culture? Are we impacting and making a difference in the culture of the country where we labor? How can we make a greater impact in a shorter period, with longer lasting effects?**

The Early Church **“ceased not to teach and preach,”** (Acts 5:42) therefore they **“filled Jerusalem with their doctrine.”** (Acts 5:28) The Apostle Paul penned it beautifully when he wrote,

**“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”**

(2 Timothy 2:2)

As we reach around the world, our goal is not only bringing people to a point of **decision**, but to **transformation** through the power of the Spirit. We must then train them to be **disciples** who can pass their new found faith along to their community.

**“Jim Russell, in his book, Awakening the Giant wrote, “Biblical illiteracy spawns serious weaknesses in Christian**

**character. Hosea 4:6 states, ‘My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.’ Lack of knowledge leaves Christians today without any sense of Biblical vision, mission, or strategy. They remain ignorant of the central purpose of discipling that brings Christ centered meaning and power into their lives.”**

## **The Vision for Portable Bible Schools**

With this premise in mind I submit my vision for the **Portable Bible Schools**. As previously mentioned, this is not a replacement or substitution for full-time training of pastors and church leadership in ministerial (pastoral) development. I am a firm believer in that and continue to labor in designing an African based and relevant program.

- The **Portable Bible Schools** take the training to where the people really are. This is quite different from bringing the people to where you are.
- This program supplements the full time efforts and augments it by providing training on every sphere of the church membership. **Portable Bible Schools** are designed to mobilize the church for the true **Body Ministry**.
- A **Portable Bible School** can be offered in a local church, in a village within easy access to students, in a central location in a region of your country, or in a zone of a large city.
- It is unique because it is portable and can be easily and quickly moved. It requires no permanent classrooms, high maintenance costs, large staff, or large sums of money to pay for it. Many times students do not even require a desk and can just use benches or pews already available.
- It impacts a larger base of people in a shorter period of time.

In Ghana, the **Portable Bible Schools** are all administrated from the training center newly dedicated in 1997 called **ACTS ACTS-Ghana (African Center for Theological Studies)**. We have **Portable Bible Schools** in every region of the country where we have our churches. We have had more than one thousand students studying in Portable Bible Schools in Ghana. Our goal is to train members and lay leaders that can also train others.

## **How are Portable Bible Schools Set Up? A Quick Overview**

- **Portable Bible Schools** are set up with two hundred lessons in all. That would be equivalent to one university semester.
- There are four levels with fifty lessons in each. At the completion of each level the student receives a certificate and participates in a graduation.
- We call our levels: **Level A, Level C, Level T, Level S** (so when they are displayed together they spell and highlight **ACTS**).
- I realize that **Acts** may translate differently in various languages so you may want to call your levels: **Level 1, Level 2, Level 3, and Level 4**.
- **Portable Bible Schools** can be designed for one night per week (two lessons per night). That would require about two years for total completion.
- In other places you may want to have a two-week program for each level, consisting of five hours of lectures per day for ten days.
- Others may want to teach the entire program using eight weeks.
- Still others may want to take one day a month and teach five hours with a level being completed at the end of ten months.
- The key to **Portable Bible Schools** is **portability** and **flexibility**. A variety of Instructors could be used.
- When you are about to begin a **Portable Bible School**, a flyer advertising the program could be sent out with a registration form attached. The form can be returned to you. We give automatic approval to all that register.
- We have no educational requirements.

- We teach both in English and in the language prevalent to the people. They can, in return, answer the Study Questions in the language they prefer.
- We do not (presently) have any examinations. The only requirement is faithful attendance.
- Each **Portable Bible School** has its own **Facilitator** who takes care of the attendance, checking homework, and other menial responsibilities.
- The Facilitators only give out the lessons that are required for that sitting.

## **ACTS: God's Training Manual For Today's Church**

Our curriculum is totally based on the “**Acts of the Apostles.**” **What greater book could be relevant to the Church throughout all ages?**

All two hundred lessons in the program are taken from “**Acts.**” Each lesson has a key Scripture from “**Acts**” but verses from all over the Bible are used in the body of the lesson. The entire textbook is divided into four books for the four levels. It is aptly entitled, “**Acts: God's Training Manual For Today's Church.**” Of course, this book does not have to be used with **Portable Bible Schools**. It has a wide range of uses from a Bible Study book, to teaching at Home Cell meetings, or as Sunday School material, or even as a Bible Correspondence program.

The lessons in the book fall under various topics that are indicated at the top left corner of every lesson.

You will note that the lessons do not follow the procedure or style of other courses on **Acts**. I trust that these lessons will be relevant, life applicable, and useful wherever they may be studied. The material is deliberately designed for easy understanding and contains **Study Questions** at the end of most of the lessons.

The lessons are constantly under revision. The first two levels have been completed. I trust these lessons will be a blessing to you (if not in a **Portable Bible School**) then in any way you can use it.

As you begin using these lessons I want you to know that I am available to assist you in any way I can. Presently, a total of one hundred lessons are available - comprising **Level A and Level C**. An answer key to all study questions is also available. All of the lessons are available on diskette and soon will be available on CDROM. The first level of this course is also available on audiocassette. A **Correspondence Bible School Program** is planned for the near future. The third level of the curriculum will be ready by June 2000. A **Training Guide** is also projected. Our **Website** is located at [www.pbsintl.org](http://www.pbsintl.org) If I can be of assistance to you in any way I am accessible through e-mail at: **Jimpoitras@aol.com**. Of course, you can also write me at the Headquarters' address. Other materials and courses are available from Reaching **Through Teaching Ministries**.

**“The field is the world.” (Matthew 13:38)** May the **Lord of the Harvest** bless you as you take the good seed to the world and may he give you a bountiful harvest as you disciple others. I always tell my students that we start off studying the Book of Acts, but end up living the Book of Acts. Let's start studying and also begin living **Acts: God's Training Manual for Today's Church**.