



## *Portable Bible Schools International*

### *Acts: God's Training Manual for Today's Church*

*By Jim Poitras*

## *How It All Began*

At the School of Missions, I listened intently as a speaker unfolded his burden for training. His concern that full-scale theological education was taking so much time (usually three years) and not getting the job of world evangelism done, caught me in a mixture of emotional responses. Having been involved in full-time Bible college work for nineteen years, one part of me wanted to emphatically reject what he was saying. Another part realized that what he was saying possessed merit for careful pondering. With the world population exploding and the supply of trained pastors dwindling proportionally, something had to be done to train more disciples in a shorter time period. In congregations around the world, we have an abundant labor force that could be mobilized to meet the discipling needs for laborers in the ripened harvest. I still maintain that full-time training for pastors and national church leadership is necessary for a solid church in any country, but I 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 church’s “List of Things to Do Today.” However, like many “to do” lists, we have pushed what needs to be done today off until a distant tomorrow that never arrives. The real priority slips further down on the list each day. Thus, the church lacks the desire needed to reach the world. We must 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 impacting our culture? Are we 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 to bring people to a point of decision, but also to transform them through the power of the Spirit. We must then train them to be disciples who can pass their newfound 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 leaders. I am a firm believer in that and continue to labor in designing an African-based, relevant program for Bible colleges.

& The Portable Bible Schools take the training to where the people are. This is quite different from bringing the people

to where we are.

& This program supplements fulltime efforts by providing training in every sphere of 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 the 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. Many times students do not even require a desk and just use any benches or pews available.

& It impacts a larger base of people in a shorter period of time.

In Ghana, the Portable Bible Schools are administrated from our training center called ACTS-Ghana (African Center for Theological Studies). We have Portable Bible Schools in every region of the country where we have churches. More than fifteen hundred students have studied in Portable Bible Schools in Ghana. Our goal is to train members and lay leaders who, in turn train others. We also reach out to other denominations with further truth for serious seekers.

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

& Portable Bible Schools are set up with two hundred lessons in all.

& 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, and Level S (so when they are displayed together they spell and highlight ACTS).

& Acts may translate differently in various languages, so you may want to call your levels: Level 1, Level 2, Level 3, and Level 4.

& Some countries prefer having more than four levels. Feel free to adjust the program and materials to best suit your needs.

& The courses have been translated into a number of languages. Check with the author concerning the translations available and/or to seek permission to translate into the language used in your field of service.

& Portable Bible Schools can be designed for one night per week (two lessons per night). This requires 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 in eight weeks. Still others may want to take one day a month and teach five hours with a level being completed in ten months.

& The key to Portable Bible Schools is portability and flexibility. A variety of instructors can 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 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 needs a 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.

### ***God's Training Manual for Today's Church***

Our curriculum is 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 the Book of 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 curriculum is divided into four books for the

four levels. It is aptly entitled, *Acts: God's Training Manual for Today's Church*. These books do not have to be used with Portable Bible Schools only. They have a wide range of uses from a Bible study book, to teaching at home cell meetings, as Sunday school material, or even as a Bible correspondence program.

The lessons in the manuals fall under various topics, as indicated in 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 lessons.

The lessons are constantly under revision. The first three levels have been completed. These lessons will be a blessing to you, if not in a Portable Bible School, then in any way that you use them.

As you use these lessons, I am available to assist you in any way I can. Presently, a total of one hundred and fifty lessons are available—comprising Level A, Level C, and Level T. Answer keys to all study questions are available for program leaders. Lessons are available on CD-ROM, when requested by missionaries. The fourth level of the curriculum will be ready by January 2003. 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, I am accessible through e-mail at: Jimpoitras@aol.com. You can also write me at the United Pentecostal Church International headquarters' address: James Poitras, Portable Bible Schools International, 8855 Dunn Road, Hazelwood, Missouri, USA.

“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 it. Let's start studying, and living *Acts: God's Training Manual for Today's Church*.