

# ACTS

## GROUP GUIDE: WEEK 3

### CONVERSATION STARTER

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What's something you are particularly zealous about or obsessed with?

### THE WALLS COME DOWN

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In this week's reading, we encounter three stories of outsiders who are invited into the family of God. First, there's a Samaritan sorcerer who seeks to use the power of the Spirit for his own gain, to make his own name great. The Samaritans were one of the great rivals of the Jewish people. But as the disciples share with them the good news about Jesus, many of them, including the Sorcerer, are baptized and welcomed in.

Next, we hear about an Ethiopian eunuch who made the weeks-long journey to the Temple to worship God, only to not be allowed inside. One of Jesus' disciples, Philip, meets him on the road and shares about Jesus and how the Gospel means all people, even eunuchs are celebrated members of God's everlasting Kingdom.

Finally, there's Saul, a man whose zeal for God leads him to seek out and murder anyone who believes in Jesus. Is God's grace and mercy great enough to extend even to this man? The surprising answer, is yes. Not only does Jesus himself appear to Saul, but God calls another Jesus-follower to welcome this outsider as one of their own. It's a stunning reminder that there is no one to whom God withholds His love and grace.

The story of Acts is the story of walls coming down. The barriers we erect around ourselves and our communities cannot stand against the love of God that exists for every person, regardless of their ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or background. The story of God's people was always a story meant to be carried to the far corners of the world. Spend a few moments discussing with your group. Who are the outsiders in our world today, and how can we be more intentional about inviting them into our circles?

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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1. What stuck out to you about the reading from this week? Was there a verse or idea that was particularly meaningful or challenging for you?
2. The Sanhedrin have a difficult time accepting Stephen's speech due to their own power and privilege. Why do you think it's harder for those with power to hear hard things? Are there places we've grown resistant to hearing hard things because of our own privilege?
3. Like Simon the Sorcerer, where do you see people trying to use God to garner power, favor, or status for themselves?
4. Can you share about a time when you felt left out? How did it make you feel and what did you do as a result?
5. These stories in Acts show us how the very people we consider outsiders are the ones God wants to invite in to be part of His family. Who would you be scandalized to see God welcoming into His family? How do you think the Church as a whole can be more welcoming to those on the margins?

## WEEKLY PRACTICE

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One of the most prominent themes in this section of Acts is the breaking down of barriers in the church. God welcomes all those who would consider themselves outsiders or unworthy of the love and reconciliation He offers. As followers of Jesus, we are called to do the same. Take a moment to think about the circles you draw around the people in your life. Who might you be leaving out—intentionally or unintentionally?

This week, ask God to bring to mind someone who fits this description for you. Consider how you might extend God's peace and hospitality to them over the next few days. Maybe it's through an encouraging note or email, an invitation to coffee or to share a meal with them. Maybe it's going as far as having the tough conversation you've been avoiding that could lead to reconciliation or forgiveness. The barriers we erect between us and others can only be broken down through intentional relationship.