

# ACTS

## GROUP GUIDE: WEEK 8

### CONVERSATION STARTER

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What's the most daring or adventurous thing you've ever done? Would you do it again?

### PAUL DEFENDS HIMSELF

*Acts 22*

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Think about the last time you faced conflict. Was it with a friend? A family member? Coworker? How did you handle it?

In this week's reading, Paul goes toe-to-toe with both the Jewish and Roman authorities. Paul is accused of being a troublemaker, a plague whose influence spreads dissent and disinformation among the community. Over and over again, false or exaggerated charges are levied his way, until the evidence mounts against him and all heads turn toward him, waiting for him to give a defense.

How would you respond? What would you do when faced with false accusations of wrongdoing or misunderstandings? Paul simply shares his story. He explains how the God of his ancestors opened his eyes to the truth of Jesus, the one he was persecuting. He explains how God called him to be a witness to this new revelation, not just to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. As he speaks, the crowd in Jerusalem listens, hushed. But when he mentions his ministry to the Gentiles, they erupt. In other words, as soon as they disagree with something Paul says, they stop listening and lash out violently.

This is a common reaction in conflict. Take a moment to discuss with your group. What is your typical reaction when you hear something you disagree with? Do you shut down and stop listening? Or do you lean in and get curious? Is there a movement or policy or idea you are particularly troubled by? What would it look like this week to lean in and get curious rather than shutting down or bowing up?

## 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. Read together Acts 23:1-3. Paul calls Ananias a “whitewashed wall” similar to how Jesus called the Pharisees “whitewashed tombs,” a way of saying they are like people who clean only the outside of a dish, leaving filth inside (Matt. 23). Can you think of ways that we as Christians try and clean up the outside appearance, while the inside is still dirty? What would it look like to be more honest and humble on the exterior within our communities?
3. Think about the role community played in Paul’s life during this season. Not only did they stand by him and provide encouragement, they also provided for his physical needs while in prison. How can you cultivate a supportive community around you to help navigate challenges and grow spiritually?
4. Paul sat in jail for two years while he waited for justice or judgment. What are you waiting for right now? And what does it look like to trust God’s timing as you encounter setbacks or challenging circumstances in your own life?

## WEEKLY PRACTICE

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Throughout Acts, we witness Paul sharing his testimony with those he meets, both Jew and Gentile. Sharing our story of the ways God has moved in our life can be intimidating, but it’s an important part of how we are called to share the message of Jesus with others. This week, we want to challenge you to share your story with someone. It could be someone you know or don’t know, a Christian or someone who doesn’t believe.

Here are a few tips to keep in mind. First, reflect on your faith journey: think about significant moments and experiences that have shaped your faith. How has your life been transformed by God? Next, write out your “elevator pitch”—a two-minute explanation for why you believe, incorporating your faith journey. Now, ask God to reveal opportunities to share your testimony with others in an appropriate way, whether it’s in a group setting or one-on-one conversation. Be open to listening for others to share their stories also. Finally, after you share, reflect on what happened. How did your story impact the person or people you shared it with? How did you feel about sharing your story? Regularly reflecting on and sharing our testimonies can not only strengthen our faith and help us stay centered on how God is working in our lives, it can also be a source of encouragement and inspiration for those around us.