

# ACTS

## GROUP GUIDE: WEEK 9

### CONVERSATION STARTER

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If you could change one thing about the world, what would you change, and how would that change impact society?

### HOW DOES IT ALL END?

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For some reason, Luke doesn't tell us how Paul's story ends. According to the early church fathers, Paul will become a martyr in Rome. Many believe he was beheaded on the emperor's order. But why does Luke end his story leaving out these grisly details?

Some argue he simply didn't know about it; he must have finished the book before Paul's death. Others argue the abrupt ending is theological. Luke's final picture of Paul is of a man in chains, continuing to preach the name of Jesus in the heart of enemy territory. At the beginning of Acts, Jesus told the disciples, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." And Luke reveals at the end of Acts how successful that mission has become. But the mission is far from over.

Luke wants us to see our own story mirrored in Acts. His open-ended conclusion invites us to consider how we carry forward the mission of Jesus. We've witnessed the travels and trials of Paul and Peter and the other disciples throughout this incredible book. Now, as N.T. Wright explains, "The journey is ours, the trials and vindications are ours, the sovereign presence of Jesus is ours, the story is ours to pick up and carry on. Luke's writing, like Paul's journey, has reached its end, but in his end is our beginning."

Take a minute to discuss this idea with your group. How are we, as a community, called to continue the story that began with Jesus and the first Christians in Acts? How does Acts inspire and challenge you to live out your faith more boldly and passionately?

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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1. What big ideas or themes are you taking with you after finishing the book of Acts?
2. We have spent a lot of time with Paul since we first heard about his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. Thinking back on where we have been with Paul since then, how has Paul's story impacted your own? Have you learned anything from him as we have read?
3. The Storm rages as Paul sails for Rome, but we see that God is still with Paul in the chaos. How have you sensed God's presence with you even, or especially, when times are difficult?
4. Reflect on the challenges and opposition faced by the early Christians throughout the book of Acts. How can their example of perseverance and faithfulness encourage you to stand firm in the midst of trials and hardships?

## WEEKLY PRACTICE

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Throughout the Gospel of Acts, we see a growing community of believers who are marked by generosity and hospitality. In the first days of this new movement, Christians are described as holding everything in common, providing for each other's needs, and doing life together. When Paul found himself shipwrecked in Malta, it was the generosity and hospitality of the locals that helped him survive. Generosity and hospitality also helped Paul during his long years in prison. Just as Jesus welcomed those on the fringes of society and cared for everyone he met, he called his disciples to do the same. As we become more like Jesus, we too should be marked by this same spirit of welcoming and open-handedness. Instead of building walls around our communities, we ought to pull up more chairs and create space at the table. Instead of hoarding resources to protect our own, we ought to share with all those who are in need, trusting God to provide for us.

This week, consider how you can participate in the spiritual practices of generosity and hospitality. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What kind of environment are you creating in your circles—at home, at work, etc?
- Are you open to bringing others into your circles? What about those who are different than you?
- How can you share your resources (time, talents, money) in service of those around you?
- Do you tend to view your resources with a scarcity mindset or as blessings from God you can use to be a blessing to others?