





## **DISCUSS**

Up to this point in Acts, the church had never moved out of Jerusalem. The apostles and first members of the early church had been wholly focused on fulfilling the first part of Acts 1:8, to “be [Jesus’s] witnesses in Jerusalem . . .” But after the death of Stephen, the church scattered. In the wake of tragedy, God worked a series of miraculous salvations, and the church began to flourish in all of Judea and Samaria. Read Acts 8:1–4.

**What challenges was the church facing? What was the result?**

This is the first time we meet Paul, the most prolific writer and evangelist in the New Testament. Before his conversion, he was called Saul and was known for his violent persecution of Christians. **What do you think it would take for someone like Saul to become a Christian?**

Even during a time of violent persecution, God was still sovereignly building his church. He worked through Philip, one of the deacons in the early church, to spread the gospel to the Samaritans. Read Acts 8:5–8, 14–17, 25.

God used the tragedy of Stephen’s death to reach “unclean” people groups, those whom most Jews would never associate with. In the video, Louie pointed out the one place a faithful Jew would never have wanted to go was Samaria. Samaritans were outsiders, disliked, and looked down on. No one would have wanted to be where Philip was.

**When has God taken you where you did not want to go? What was your reaction to that circumstance?**

Jews disliked Samaritans because they were ethnically half-Jewish, but Philip saw them as people loved by God and became the first witness of Jesus in Samaria. **How does Philip show the Samaritans that they are loved by God?**

For the first time in Acts, the gospel is preached specifically to people who were not Jewish, to outsiders looked down on by society. **Are there any groups of people our society looks down on? Who are our modern-day outsiders?**

**Who is a witness of Jesus to these people?**

After seeing the Holy Spirit come upon the Samaritan church, Peter and John stopped at many small villages to preach the good news. Jesus broke down the barriers between Jew and Samaritans, making outsiders brothers and sisters in the church. **What would change if you looked at the outsiders in your community the way Peter and John did?**

**What could you and your small group do to reach out to the outsiders in your community?**

**What barriers might there be to reaching these people with the gospel?**

**In what ways can you pray and trust God to overcome these barriers as he did with Philip and the Samaritans?**

**Note:** To study Simon, the Samaritan magician, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

The second group of people we see the gospel spread to are the searchers, those who are curious about Jesus and willing to ask Christians about him. Read Acts 8:26–31, 35–38.

The Ethiopian eunuch was in Jerusalem to worship God but was struggling to understand the Scriptures.

**According to verse 31, what did this man need? How did Philip respond to this need in verse 35?**

Every Christian should be ready for encounters like the one Philip had with the Ethiopian. If someone asks us about Jesus, we should be both willing and able to proclaim Jesus to them.

**How would you share the gospel with someone who does not know Jesus? To practice, share the good news of Jesus with someone in your group.**

**What makes you nervous about talking to someone who is asking questions about Jesus? How might you overcome your concerns and fears?**

Philip's willingness to talk about Jesus with a searcher changed the Ethiopian's life. But not all evangelism is that easy. Sometimes God calls us to courageously be his witnesses to those who are adamantly opposed to Jesus. Read Acts 9:10–20.

**Note:** To study Saul's encounter with Jesus, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.

Saul was not only opposed to Christians—he was also infamous for zealously persecuting them. Ananias had good reason to be afraid of him. But, like Philip, he was willing to go to the people God called him to. **Who in your life is adamantly opposed to Christianity? What reasons do you have to believe they would reject you if you shared the gospel with them?**

God did not command Ananias to do something impossible. Jesus had done the hard work of converting and saving Saul. **In what ways can you pray for God to prepare the way for you as you share the work of Jesus with people who are opposed to him?**

Saul became a pillar of the church, spreading the gospel across the known world and writing most of the New Testament. But we often forget Ananias, who overcame fear to be faithful. Ananias simply showed up and was willing to serve God. **What could it look like to “show up” and love the people in your life who are opposed to Jesus?**

The final group of people who are converted in this section of Acts is the Gentiles. Like the Samaritans, they were disliked and rejected by the Jews. Like the seekers, they sometimes sought out and worshipped God. But more often than not, they were like Saul, opposed to the gospel. The Romans we meet in Acts 10 were oppressors and enemies. Read Acts 10:25–35, 44–48.

**Note:** To learn more about the Holy Spirit coming upon the Samaritans and Gentiles, go to **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this study.

Cornelius was a devout, God-fearing Roman centurion. He was seeking God, much like the Ethiopian eunuch. A supernatural vision had told him to wait for Peter, much like Saul was waiting for Ananias. But it was unlawful for Peter to even be near him. **In what ways might our society erect barriers between the church and those seeking God?**

In verse 34, God has reoriented Peter’s vision. **What realization has God given him?**

Sometimes, the people in the church need to have their views reoriented. We can be tempted to think we are better than others, more loved by God, or even that God does not love certain groups of people. **In what ways**

**does the church today think that God shows favoritism?**

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**How might favoritism lead us to treat people differently or disregard certain people?**

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As Louie said in the video, there are no boundaries for the gospel. It is for everyone. The Holy Spirit fell upon Gentiles before the church in Jerusalem thought it was possible. It shocked Peter and the men he was with.

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**Is there anyone you have given up on or assume cannot be saved? How might the conversion stories in Acts 8–10 change your view of that person?**

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**In what ways can you eagerly pray for and witness to that person this week?**

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**LAST WORD**

There is nothing that hems in the work of God. He is not stopped by unwanted situations, nor does he avoid unwanted people. The work and good news of Jesus is for everyone. But we can forget God loves *everyone*, fencing in our faithfulness according to the boundaries of society and our own prejudice.

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We do not know whom God will save, but we do know that God can save anyone. All he asks of us is to be faithful to share the gospel with everyone, no matter whom he puts in our path.

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## GO DEEPER

This section has two potential functions:

1. It can supplement your small group discussion with topics your group may be interested in. We've highlighted where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. As the leader, it would be good to familiarize yourself with this section just in case your conversation turns to one of these topics.
2. These sections can also function as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider using these sections to deepen your group's study of the book of Acts.

### **1. Simon the Magician**

In this session, we saw God save all kinds of people, particularly those we think are farthest from God. One of these unlikely converts was Simon the magician, sometimes called Simon Magus in church tradition. Read Acts 8:9–17.

Simon wasn't like modern-day magicians; he was not an illusionist. Simon was promoting himself as the manifestation of God's power, working false miracles with satanic power. Where Philip preached Jesus, Simon promoted himself. **In what ways could Simon be seen as a rival of Philip? How were they similar and different?**

Simon, however, was not a rival of Philip. Instead, he became another unlikely convert. But Simon wasn't able to overcome his desire for personal power and glory. Read Acts 8:18–24.

When Simon saw the true power of God, he wanted it for himself and thought he could buy it from the apostles. His sin may seem distant from us today, but we, in many ways, also try to purchase the gifts and blessings of God. **Have you ever bargained with God in prayer? What were you wanting him to give to you? What did you promise him in return?**

When we are distressed, envious, or uncomfortable, we can use our action and resources as bargaining chips, trying to buy better gifts and blessings from God. But we forget everything we have is from God, including our salvation. **In what ways do you feel like God is holding out on you? What areas of your life do you feel are lacking?**

**What does it look like to build a relationship with God that is not dependent on the kinds of gifts he gives to us?**

Like Simon, we can come to God for his gifts rather than a relationship with him. Take some time to reflect on your own desires. Think about what you want from God, what you expect from him, and how you might be using him as a means to an end. If you need to repent of anything, take this time to do so.

## **2. Saul Meets Jesus**

This session is full of conversion stories, but only one person in Acts came to know Jesus before meeting a Christian. Read the story of Saul's conversion in Acts 9:1–22.

When Christians scattered throughout Judea, Saul left Jerusalem to hunt and imprison them. **But, according to verse 5, who was Saul actually persecuting?**

**Based on the way Ananias and the men in the synagogue talk, what was Saul's reputation?**

Saul was completely forgiven in Christ, was baptized, and immediately began proclaiming Christ in the synagogues. Verse 22 shows us that he was an expert in evangelism, even as a new believer. But Saul, who was later known as Paul, never fully got over his past. Read 1 Corinthians 15:8–9 and Galatians 1:13.

Paul carried his past like an unhealed wound. He was painfully aware of the destruction he had caused. Some of us can relate to that pain. **In what ways might you be carrying shame leftover from your life before Jesus?**

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17–20 and Galatians 2:20.

Despite Paul's awareness of his sin, he couldn't help but rejoice in salvation. The life we had before Jesus has been completely forgiven by God. He knows the worst of our actions and still loves us. We cannot beat ourselves up over a stain God has washed away. We must also imitate Paul in his view of a redeemed life.

**What can you do to remind yourself that you are a new creation in Christ?**

**What could it look like for you to live as if Christ were living in you?**



God has reconciled you completely to himself, wiping away all your sin. **In what ways can you extend this grace to others when they sin against you?**

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**In what ways can you be a “minister of reconciliation” to people who do not know Jesus, who are sitting in the shame of their sin not knowing the forgiveness of God?**

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### **3. Samaritans, Gentiles, and the Holy Spirit**

There are three times the Holy Spirit comes upon groups of people. The first is when the Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples in Acts 2 during the day of Pentecost. Read Acts 2:1–11.

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**What were the defining characteristics of this miracle? Who was the gospel being preached to during this miracle?**

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Read Acts 2:32, 37–41. **What was the purpose of Peter speaking in tongues? What was the result of the Holy Spirit being expressed through tongues?**

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In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit moves through the apostles to build the church. The miraculous gift of tongues was given as proof that Peter was not drunk but speaking the truth as he ministered to Jews.

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Read Acts 8:14–17, 25.

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**Who was Peter ministering to during this miracle? What was Peter and John’s response to this miracle in verse 25?**

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Luke does not tell us how the power of the Holy Spirit manifests, but there must have been some sort of accompanying sign because Simon the Magician sought to purchase the power for himself in verse 18. As in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit moves to a new group of people, causing a new wave of ministry.

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Read Acts 10:34–35, 44–48.

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**What are the defining characteristics of this outpouring of the Holy Spirit?**

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**What did God teach Peter and the people who were with him through this miracle?**

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Peter's amazement at the salvation of the Gentiles shows us that he did not think they could be saved. In the next session of this study, we will see that some people in the church did not like that Peter baptized Gentiles (11:1–18). But after hearing that they had received the Holy Spirit in the same way the disciples had in Acts 2, the church rejoiced in the salvation of the Gentiles and began to send missionaries across the known world. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was a sign to the skeptical Jews that all people could be saved.

The outpourings of the Holy Spirit show us, like the Jews of Acts, that all people can be saved. **Are there any people you doubt can be saved?**

**What would it look like to trust God and evangelize to them despite your skepticism?**

#### 4. Acts 8–10 Reading Plan

Acts is a long book, and we won't be able to study every verse of it during each of these sessions. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of the book so that you can dig more deeply into God's Word.

This week, use this reading guide to break up Acts 8–10, the stories of God's love for all people.

Day 1: Witnesses in Samaria (Acts 8:1–25)

Day 2: Witnesses throughout Judea (Acts 8:26–40; 9:32–43)

Day 3: The Conversion of Saul (Acts 9:1–31)

Day 4: Two Visions (Acts 10:1–23)

Day 5: Gentiles Receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:24–48)