

READ

Acts 15:5–29, 36–41; 16:16–33; 17:16–31; 18:24–28.

Note: We have made a daily reading guide of Acts 15–19 so that you can read this whole section throughout your week. You can find the reading plan at the end of this study in **Go Deeper Section 4**.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Louie Giglio’s teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What sorts of conflicts were in the early church?

Why should we worship God when life gets tough?

What common longing do all people share? How could this commonality help us reach more people with the gospel?

Show Session 6: The God Above It All (24 Minutes).

Lined area for taking notes, consisting of 20 horizontal lines.

DISCUSS

In this session, we saw a series of difficult circumstances put in front of God’s people: conflict, injustice, unwanted circumstances, and hostility towards evangelism. Each of these obstacles threatened the early church in different ways and could have caused Paul to stop the expansion of the mission. But through all the hurdles and troubles, Acts shows us the God who is above it all. Worshipping him is always the right way to move forward.

First, let’s look at the conflicts in Acts 15–19 and examine how conflict continues to affect us today.

In what ways has conflict affected the relationships between you and the people in your church?

Note: Answering this question could draw you and your group into gossip. Guard the discussion by focusing on the ways conflict has affected you personally and the ways it can build walls between us and other Christians rather than on the specifics of a conflict or on other people.

Has there been any resolution to this conflict? If so, how was conflict overcome? If not, in what ways does this conflict continue to affect your church?

Louie pointed out three different conflicts in this section of Acts: conflict with legalists, Paul’s personal conflict with John Mark, and the division in Corinth. Briefly, we can categorize these as theological, interpersonal, and invented conflicts. Read Acts 15:5–29, 36–41; 18:24–28; and 1 Corinthians 3:2–7.

Think about each instance of division in the church. **In what ways were they justified? In what ways were they avoidable?**

What would you change about the way those conflicts were handled?

Think about the disagreements and divisions you have had with other Christians. **In what ways were those conflicts justified or avoidable? What, if anything, do you wish you had done differently?**

In the video, Louie talked about a better way to approach conflict in the church and encouraged us to seek reconciliation and unity as God’s people. Read

Romans 12:17–21.

Often, we do not want peace in an argument. We want to get even or get back at those who hurt us, even if they are our brothers or sisters in Christ. **What makes vengeance so appealing when we are in a disagreement?**

What makes it difficult to let go of getting even and choose to forgive instead?

Louie said that conflict tends to turn us inward, dividing us and slowing the spread of the gospel. Therefore, creating peace in the church is a way to obey God and expand his worship throughout the world. **What could you do to fulfill Romans 12:18 and create peace where there is conflict between you and other Christians?**

Note: To examine biblical ways to approach theological, interpersonal, and invented conflicts, go to **Go Deeper Sections 1–3** at the end of this study.

Second, Louie talked about how we should respond to the difficult circumstances in our lives that appear to derail us and what we are doing for God’s mission. In Philippi, Paul and Silas were unjustly imprisoned, bringing their missionary journey to a screeching halt.

Read Acts 16:16–33.

What was Paul and Silas’s response to difficult circumstances?

What is your typical response to difficult circumstances? Where do you think God is in those moments?

It seemed like things couldn’t get any worse for Paul and Silas. But they knew that God had not changed, even though their situation had. Louie said, “The God of the mountaintops is the God of the valleys, and he is worthy of our praise today. It may not change your situation, but [worship] will change you in the midst of your situation.” **What would it look like for you to praise God, even in your current circumstances?**

Paul and Silas’s situation was a part of a much larger plan. Ultimately, it was used to introduce the prisoners and guards to Jesus. **What opportunities could your current circumstances give you to tell others about Jesus?**

At the end of the video, Louie explained why worship is always the right response to tough situations. **Do you**

agree with him? Why or why not?

What might make it difficult for you to worship through pain and sorrow?

The final hurdle to God’s mission in this session was the philosophical elite in Athens. These men were some of the brightest minds in the western world and they wanted to hear more about Jesus. That may not seem like a hurdle, but oftentimes evangelism is intimidating. Fear can keep us from sharing Jesus with people, especially when we do not understand their beliefs.

Read 17:19–32.

Paul usually visited the synagogues in a city first (17:1, 10, 17), reaching out to those who did not know Jesus using the common ground of the Old Testament. **What common ground do you use in your own evangelism? How can a shared interest or connection help pave the way for you to share Christ with those who do not know him?**

Paul was in a foreign place with foreign beliefs and was set in front of foreign rulers. There were many reasons for him to be intimidated. Evangelism can be intimidating on its own, but when we lose common ground with the people we are talking to, it can be terrifying. **Think of some people you work with or live nearby but have nothing in common with. What hurdles do you think would keep them from accepting Jesus?**

While it may seem like we have nothing in common with some people, we all share the same desire to know God. The Athenians were so desperate to please the gods that they made an altar to an unknown god. Today, people search for spirituality in various ways, seeking meaning, purpose, and identity. **In what ways do the people around you reveal their longing for God through their passions? What do they fill their lives with instead of God? Be as specific as you can.**

In what ways could you use our cultural expressions of our longing for God to point people to God?

Some of the men at the Aeropagus laughed at Paul, some wanted to know more, and some believed in Jesus and joined the church. Our evangelism very often has the same mixed results. **What could it look like for you to share Jesus in hope of the few that would believe instead of in fear of the few that might laugh?**

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. Finding Unity in Theological Conflict

Theology is a wonderful and beautiful thing, but when Christians argue about their theological convictions—no matter how small—it can lead to broken relationships, split churches, and a damaged public witness.

What do you think makes it so difficult for us to disagree civilly about theology?

What do you think non-Christians see when a church experiences internal conflict?

We cannot give up our convictions because we want to avoid an argument. But we also cannot beat down other Christians with arguments trying to prove we are right either. So how should Christians talk about theological differences? Read Ephesians 4:1–6.

What would it look like to make every effort to keep peace with those you disagree with?

Walking into a theological conversation can feel like going into battle. But Christians shouldn't try to wage war against each other. **What happens when we fail to be patient or bear with others in love?**

In what ways does the goal of Christian unity go against our battlefield mentality?

Theological conflict should not be about beating the other side or winning a debate. Instead, we should be lovingly focused on helping one another see God more clearly and serve him more faithfully. Read 2 Timothy 2:24–26. **What could you do to diffuse heated arguments so that you might have more productive discussions about theology?**

In what ways could your theological arguments change to be more kind, patient, and gentle?

Division can come easily in the church, but we are called to maintain peace despite our differences and point people to Jesus in all our conversations. **What could it look for you to argue in hope of reconciliation instead of in hope of winning the argument?**

2. Dealing with Personal Conflict

Conflict is unavoidable. Even Paul and his closest friends fell into disagreements. We will find it at work, at home, with our friends and spouses, and even with strangers at the grocery store. Because we cannot avoid conflict, we should think about the right way to respond to it. Read Romans 12:16–18.

We are called to live in harmony with everyone, not just people like us. **What groups does our society believe the church *should* be in conflict with?**

In what ways have Christians believed that it is okay to live in conflict with others?

Verse 18 demands more of us than we might initially think. We might assume this verse means “do what you can but if someone else is mad, that’s their problem.” But God does not allow us to tolerate unresolved conflict. Read Matthew 5:21–26.

According to Jesus, we should be as eager to be forgiven by the people we have wronged as we are to be forgiven by God. Instead of seeking to justify ourselves in conflict, we should look for ways we have wronged others and seek to be forgiven. **Are there any Christians in your life who have something against you? What would it look like for you to completely own your side of the conflict and ask for forgiveness?**

What might make owning your mistakes and seeking forgiveness difficult for you?

We not only need to seek to be forgiven but to also forgive those who wronged us. Read Matthew 6:9–15. **Why can it be hard to forgive a person who has wronged us?**

God forgave us while we were still sinning against him (Romans 5:8). He did not wait for us to clean up or fix our attitudes before he sent Jesus to rescue us. Our

forgiveness should look like God’s forgiveness. But that kind of forgiveness is radical, feels unnatural, and is costly. **What could it look like to forgive someone who has hurt you in the way God has forgiven you?**

3. What to Do with Invented Drama

While every conflict might feel important, some arguments are wastes of time, only serving to divide God’s people. The invented rivalry between Paul and Apollos was one of those conflicts, and the way Paul handled it helps us learn how we should treat invented conflict in our own lives. Read Acts 18:24–28.

What was admirable about Apollos? In what ways was he a huge help to the church?

Apollos was a gifted and passionate evangelist, just like Paul. There is no evidence that Apollos’s gifts threatened Paul or that the two men had a rivalry, but their followers began to oppose one another. Read 1 Corinthians 3:1–8.

According to Paul, the jealousy and dissension between his followers and the followers of Apollos was a sign of spiritual immaturity. He goes as far as to call them infants. It was not just that they were pitting two leaders against one another, but they were also dividing the church based on the personality they followed. **Based on verses 5–8, what is the role of a spiritual leader like Paul or Apollos? Who had the Corinthians forgotten in their spiritual development?**

In what ways have you seen the church divided and pitted against one another in rivalries like the one in Corinth?

What effect did these conflicts have on the ministry of the church?

Infighting in the church comes easily, but God’s people are called to disregard worthless and divisive conflict. If a conflict only serves to divide us over secondary or tertiary issues, we should reject the whole conversation and move toward maturity in Christ. Read 2 Timothy 2:22–23. **What conflicts, infighting, or drama in your life can you dismiss as a “foolish and stupid argument”?**

What could it look like to dismiss these divisions and strive for unity within your church?
