

Life Group Discussion Guide

Against All Odds: How the Name of Jesus Spreads
Week 1: One Small Step for Man • Acts 11:19–30

“That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.”

These words – famously spoken by the first man to set foot on the moon – are perhaps even more fitting to the events that took place in Acts 11. As we begin our study of the book of Acts, we witness some men whose names we don’t even know take the bold step of bringing the Name of Jesus to people who were not Jewish. It was then that the Gospel began its unstoppable spread beyond the confines of the Jewish people into the diverse and populous Roman world – and, eventually, to us.

This chapter shows followers of Jesus doing remarkable things in service to Him, and we’re going to take a good look at what fueled them – the grace of God. This brings us to our Big Idea: God’s grace powers the service that spreads Jesus’ name.

What does grace-empowered service look like?

1. Risk-taking

After the death of Stephen – the first martyr for the faith – Jesus’ followers were scattered. They began speaking of Jesus everywhere they went, but only to Jews. That is, until some of them took a risk. They broke the mold and “began to speak to Greeks also” – and what happened? “The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.” (v. 21)

It turns out, the Lord was eager to bless their risk-taking faith.

- What are some things that keep us from taking risks for God’s Kingdom?
- Would you describe yourself as having risk-taking faith? Why or why not?
- Share a time when you took a risk for Jesus’ sake. What was the outcome?
- What risk is God asking you to take? Discuss the role His grace plays in empowering you to do so.

2. Bridge-building

When word of what was happening in Antioch got back to headquarters (the church in Jerusalem), the leaders there sent someone specific to check it out: Barnabas. Why him? Because Barnabas was a bridge-builder.

When Barnabas arrived in Antioch – a pagan, cosmopolitan city – you can imagine what he might’ve seen. The people were likely struggling with their sexuality, their drinking, their money habits, their understanding of Jesus, and a host of other things. But Barnabas saw past the rough exterior to something deeper, something greater. He saw the grace of God at work.

What was true of the early church is still true of our churches today. Here's how Pastor Jon put it:

"So many people come into the church and all they can see is problems. That's easy. What's hard is to see the grace of God at work anywhere people proclaim the name of Jesus. And if you, like Barnabas, are full of the Spirit and faith, you can see God's grace, and it can fill your heart with joy and it can turn you into bridge-builder."

- What qualities do you imagine a bridge-builder has? How are these qualities reflective of God's character?
- What keeps us from building bridges to those who are different from us, even in the church?
- What people does God want you to build a bridge to?

3. Christo-centricity

When Barnabas saw the great number of Gentiles coming into the church, he realized he needed help. These new converts were going to need a great teacher, and he had just the man for the job: Saul (later called Paul).

Verse 26 tells us that it's here, under Barnabas and Saul's teaching, that the disciples were first called "Christians." Why is this significant? Because it illustrates that the church in Antioch was being taught the centrality of Jesus Christ for all of life. He was their new identity. They were Christ-people.

- How would you describe your identity?
- If being a Christian were a crime, would there be enough evidence to convict you? Why or why not?
- What has being a Christian cost you? What is true of you and your lifestyle only because you're a Christian?

4. Generous giving

Early Christianity was marked by generosity. When the church in Antioch was prophetically warned that a severe famine would come, they not only prepared for their own needs, but "decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea."

This simple act of generosity is recorded in Scripture because it reflects the heart of our God – the God who sent His own Son to rescue us from the spiritual famine we found ourselves in. Pastor Jon said it this way:

"We can be this kind of church only when we're soaked in the grace of God. He took the greatest risk, built the strongest bridge, and gave the most generously when he gave us the Christ in our Christian name."

- How is God calling you to be generous with the resources He's given you?

- How is God calling you to be generous with the Good News of His Son, Jesus Christ?
- Pray now for an increase of faith in and awareness of God's grace – the grace that empowers us to serve Jesus and spread His Name. Pray for the boldness to place Christ at the center of our lives, the foundation from which we take risks, build bridges, and give generously of ourselves.