

# Group Discussion Guide for Week of 10/18/2021

Riverside Home Group Discussion Guide

Scripture Text to accompany the themes of the Sunday Sermon; *Acts 15:1-31 (NIV)*

**15** Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."<sup>2</sup> This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.<sup>3</sup> The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad.<sup>4</sup> When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.<sup>5</sup> Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses."<sup>6</sup> The apostles and elders met to consider this question.<sup>7</sup> After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe.<sup>8</sup> God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us.<sup>9</sup> He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.<sup>10</sup> Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear?<sup>11</sup> No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."<sup>12</sup> The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.<sup>13</sup> When they finished, James spoke up. "Brothers," he said, "listen to me.<sup>14</sup> Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles.<sup>15</sup> The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:<sup>16</sup> "After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it,<sup>17</sup> that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things'—<sup>18</sup> things known from long ago.<sup>19</sup> "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.<sup>20</sup> Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.<sup>21</sup> For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath."<sup>22</sup> Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, men who were leaders among the believers.<sup>23</sup> With them they sent the following letter: The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings.<sup>24</sup> We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said.<sup>25</sup> So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul—<sup>26</sup> men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>27</sup> Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing.<sup>28</sup> It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements:<sup>29</sup> You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.<sup>30</sup> So the men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter.<sup>31</sup> The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message.

## General Question Bank

**Observation** (what does the text say?) **Interpretation** (what does it mean?) **Application** (what does it mean to me/us?)

**Know** (what does the text say about God?) **Be** (what does it say about us?) **Do** (what does it call us to do?)

**Together** (What is our communal identity/response according to the passage/Holy Spirit?)

## Discussion/Topic Starter (Ice Breaker)

- When have you seen a dispute/conflict between Christians handled in a truly Christ-like way?

## Acts 15:1-31

O: What things in the text strike you or jump out at you? Why?

*\*\*\*Another way to ask: "Choose one verse or phrase from the passage that stands out to you. This could be something you're intrigued by, something that makes you uncomfortable, something that puzzles you, something that resonates with you, or just something you want to examine further." Now share it with the group*

O: Read vs. 1-11. What would you say is at stake for the church in this discussion and controversy?

O: Whose perspectives are being considered as the church weighs this decision? And what are those perspectives/positions?

I: What impact might Paul and Barnabas's testimonies in vs. 4 and 12 have on discussion and conclusions?

I: What bearing does James's reference to Amos 9:11-12 (vs. 16-18) have on the controversy?

O: Look at vs. 22-31. How do the leaders ensure that the council's decision is adequately communicated to the churches?

I: Look at the decision made, outlined in vs. 6-21. It is decided that 1) Gentile believers in Jesus need not be circumcised as a condition of becoming Christians, and 2) Gentile Christians ought to stay away from any rituals that evoke pagan worship practices. What are some of the implications of this decision for the church community?

I: Why would this letter have delighted those who received it? (v. 31)

A: Where might God be calling you to embrace a freedom that you haven't embraced?

A: Where might God be calling you to lay down a freedom in order to love your neighbor and be at peace with them?

-How WILL you respond this week? What one question do you want us to ask of you next week in regard to this?

## Recommended Follow-up:

**Pray:** Pray together, and really focus in on that we are meeting with God, He's in the room, and He wants us to KNOW Him. Pray together, spend some time being silent.

**Respond:** Spend this week responding to God's word as fleshed out in the group time, as well as journey through this week's devotional guide.

## **An explanation on how Riverside structures these discussion guides\*:**

Riverside defines a disciple of Jesus as a **“Know, Be, Do”** person. And since Jesus told us to “make disciples” we use the “Know, Be, Do” framework in our discussion guides. We believe the process for this transformation happens in community, hence the **“Together”** part of the Riverside mission as well.

Riverside leadership regularly asks questions around these areas:

- “What do we need to **know** about God?”
- “Who do we need to **be**?”
- “What do we need to **do**?”
- **“Together**, what is our communal identity/response according to the passage/Holy Spirit?”

Here is what we mean by “Know, Be, Do” (based on [Colossians 1:9-10](#), see below)

**Know** – *“to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives..., growing in the knowledge of God.”* Not just knowing about Jesus, but knowing Him personally, intimately, and deeply. This is also about knowing the scriptures, knowing the voice of the Holy Spirit, even knowing yourself.

**Be** – *“so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way.”* Becoming more like Jesus (sanctification). This is about our character and our heart and our motivations, our passions and convictions change the more we get to Know Jesus (and others).

**Do** – *“bearing fruit in every good work, ...”* Knowing Jesus and Becoming like Jesus practically will change our actions. As we grow in these areas we will naturally DO the things that Jesus did while in the flesh on earth (living and loving like Jesus). Some broad categories around DO are evangelism and justice and service.

Notice *“bearing fruit in every good work”* then yields more *“growing in the knowledge of God.”* In other words, while “Know, Be, Do” are three distinct words, they are deeply interconnected.

As a side note, the next chapter states: *<sup>6</sup> So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. <sup>8</sup> See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ. (Col. 2:6-8)*  
To aid in this process Riverside also has a **daily devotional guide available each week**.

### **Colossians 1:9-10, NIV**

*For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,...*

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\* As discussed in Riverside’s HGLT (Home Group Leader Training), these guides are to be starting points for home group leaders to develop their own guides and approaches to leading group discussions. This is a resource tool, not a rigid “go through this guide word-for-word.” There are intentionally too many questions for a single home group time. This guide was created in consultation with [Acts](#), N. T. Wright for Everyone Bible Study Guides; [Acts](#), Life Change Series; [Acts: Seeing the Spirit at Work](#), John Stott Bible Studies, [Book of Acts](#), Life Lessons with Max Lucado.