**Live in Community**



Small Group Study

**Volume Overview**

**Better Together**

Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. ([Ephesians 4:3](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Eph4.3))

*The Christian life is never lived alone. When we become a Christian, we’re adopted into God’s family. We’re welcomed into a community. We’re meant to live and grow in faith together. But that takes humility and intentionality. We grow together as we pray and study Scripture together. We bear responsibility for one another by our encouragement and our honoring of those in authority. God is growing us together as one body, one family.*

**Session Overview**

**Overcome Differences**

**Biblical Encounter:** The Church Meets to Navigate Challenges ([Acts 15:1–20](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac15.1-20))

**Outcome:** Look to godly leaders and seek God’s wisdom to know His direction.

*In this session, we’ll look at a monumental church meeting that helped believers navigate the challenge of differences. The Church was still in the early years and growing rapidly, so they had to weigh every teaching seriously as it could affect their movement for better or for worse. During this time, some believers began to teach that people could only be saved if they followed the Jewish observance of circumcision. To discover the truth, a group of leaders met together to seek God’s wisdom and find His direction for the Church.*

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| First time leading *Live* for Adults? Check out the [Facilitator Guide](https://0b769b0ed3569ef9d18b-f88d8272f61086866d50d048b43ef630.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/sites/biblengagementproject/Listen_Facilitator_Guide.pdf). |

To access session content and videos from a computer, visit: [BibleEngagementProject.com/downloads](https://bibleengagementproject.com/downloads)

**Engage**

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| **QUESTION**  Have you ever disagreed with someone you didn’t expect to disagree with? |

Consider these scenarios. It’s Christmas. The family gathers around the table to eat a great dinner. Someone says a prayer and the feast begins. Then someone decides they want to talk about a highly controversial topic. Disruptively, part of the family draws a line and chooses different sides.

It’s the day of the big game. Fans gather at the stadium in their team colors to yell and stand together for their team. But then the team doesn't do so well. The fans begin to have different opinions about the quality of their team, their coach, their players, and whether they should just leave the game early.

It’s Sunday morning at church. The believers gather to worship God. But different ideas come up about what to believe and how to behave.

Each of these differences can be a part of everyday life for any group we find ourself in. How then can we solve our big and little differences in godly ways?

**Watch**

As we watch this video, think about your answer to this question: How do you typically handle disagreements with someone?



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| **QUESTION**  How do you typically handle disagreements with someone? |

**Consider What the Bible Says**

The Early Church had some differences from other religions during the first century AD. While other religions focused more on a physical place their deity would reside, Christians held that their bodies were the temple of God ([1 Corinthians 6:19](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.1Co6.19)). Other religions had sacrifices to offer their gods, but the first Christians taught that Jesus sacrificed himself to make us right with God. Other religions had priests, but the Church would explain that the risen Jesus was now their Great High Priest ([Hebrews 4:14](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Heb4.14)). Beliefs like these separated Christianity from other religions and unified the believers.

But then some people began teaching that all believers needed to be circumcised just like the Jews were. This discussion caused a once-unified group to separate into smaller factions. How the Early Church handled these differences is important for us to learn from today.

**The Best Direction Includes the Wisdom of Others**

Read [Acts 15:1–3](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac15.1-3).

The church in Antioch seemed like a vibrant and healthy group of believers that was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles ([Acts 11:19–21](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac11.19-21)). Then at some point, believers came from Judea and began teaching that all believers must be circumcised to be saved. This probably seemed reasonable to the Jewish believers because circumcision was already a part of their culture. But what about a Gentile believer? Was this true? This was one major disagreement that had to be solved because the legitimacy of some people’s salvation was being questioned.

The Antioch church chose to solve it by sending some of their important leaders to Jerusalem to talk with leaders there. They weren’t going to decide what was right by themselves. They knew that the answers to difficult questions were best discovered in the wisdom of community and guidance from more mature spiritual leaders. As the Church reasoned together, they would discover the answer together.

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| **QUESTION**  Why do you think these Jewish believers felt like the tradition of circumcision had to continue as a part of their Christian faith? |

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| **QUESTION**  Have you ever witnessed a tradition being enforced like this? Tell us about it. |

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| **QUESTION**  How do you imagine this scenario would play out today? Would people stay and work things through or find a new church? |

**The Best Direction Begins with Unity**

Read [Acts 15:4–6](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac15.4-6).

Paul and Barnabas arrived in Jerusalem after a long journey. Note that we don’t read about the argument becoming aggressive quickly like it seemed to in Antioch. The Antioch arguments began with what believers didn’t have in common. The Jerusalem meeting began with what the believers did have in common—joy over what God was doing. This starting point probably made a difference. As we try to settle differences with other believers, it’s important to keep what unifies us in the forefront.

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| **QUESTION**  Do you think Paul and Barnabas discussed this strategy as they journeyed from Antioch to Jerusalem? |

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| **QUESTION**  Do you find yourself starting difficult conversations with common ground or plunging right in? Do you notice a difference in these approaches when you’ve seen them in practice? |

**The Best Direction Is Confirmed**

Read [Acts 15:7–20](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac15.7-20).

Talk about a powerful lineup of speakers! First, Peter reminded them of how the Holy Spirit had spoken to him about including the Gentiles ([Acts 10:9–33](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac10.9-33)). Next, Paul and Barnabas described how they had seen God’s Spirit moving among the Gentiles. Finally, James, a church leader in Jerusalem and half-brother of Jesus, pointed them to the Old Testament Scriptures that confirmed this was God’s plan all along.

We would be wise to stop and look at the three key factors that helped them make their decision. First, there was the voice of the Holy Spirt. Second, there were real-life circumstances that confirmed what the Spirit had said. Finally, there was confirmation that the first two lined up with God’s written Word. It’s also extremely important that all of this evidence was presented by people who were known to be full of integrity. This pattern for decision-making can serve us well in our life and in our church.

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| **QUESTION**  What do you think was the most compelling piece of evidence to change the minds of the Jewish believers? |

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| **QUESTION**  When have you been desperate to know what’s true? Did you use some of these same methods to help you to know the truth? |

**Did You Know?**

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| *One aspect of the argument surrounding circumcision was the social implications of the visible mark. In the Greco-Roman society, which was now being introduced to the gospel, many activities such as exercise or bathing were done publicly by males without clothes. As a result, those who bore the mark of circumcision were easy to point out and were often ridiculed and treated negatively by the pagan world. This likely created added tension when discussing certain believers choosing not to participate in circumcision.* |

**Reflect**

**Look to godly leaders and seek God’s wisdom to know His direction.**

The church in Antioch was looking for the truth about salvation through Jesus. They sent their very best leaders to find the answer. The two groups presented their evidence and listened with open hearts. It’s interesting to note that they didn’t just agree to disagree. In fact, they were committed to finding the answer together. When the Church comes across differences, this can be a pattern for godly leaders to seek wisdom and know God’s direction.

This is also true in our individual life. When we’re searching for the truth, we must search God’s Word and listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. But we should also be open to the wisdom of godly leaders. In his letter to Titus ([Titus 2:1–8](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Tt2.1-8)), the apostle Paul affirmed this when he said that older believers should teach younger ones. Without the wisdom of those who have more experience than we do, we are missing a key tool for seeking the truth.

**Listen to God**

Let’s pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

**Personal Reflection Questions**

*Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.*

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| **QUESTION**  What part of your life is in the biggest need of direction? |

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| **QUESTION**  Which godly people can you look to who can help you find answers? |

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| **QUESTION**  What can you find in common with those you have differences with? |

**Activate**

This story is about a group of people who were seeking truth by coming together to ask God what is true. They shared together about what God was doing. They were reminded about who God was using to grow His church. Then they made the Bible their foundation for direction and found the answers they were seeking as a result.

**Challenge**

Spend time searching the Bible for what God has already said about an issue that might be troubling you. That could mean doing an Internet search for Bible verses on marriage or about money. It could be comparing verses that talk about forgiveness. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you as you search God’s Word. Then be willing to talk with a trusted godly leader about what you have found.

**Prayer Requests**

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| Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week. |

We must pray together for God’s help believing He will answer anything that confuses us or causes disagreements between believers. The daily devotions are an extension of this discussion.

**Live on Your Own**

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| *Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.* |

**Day 1: The Church Meets to Navigate Challenges**

Read [Acts 15:1–20](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ac15.1-20).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven’t already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

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| **QUESTION**  What is God saying to you about looking to godly leaders to seek God’s wisdom and know His direction? |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 2: Samuel Learned from Eli to Hear God’s Voice**

Read [1 Samuel 3:1–10](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.1Sa3.1-10).

Samuel was just a boy learning the ways of God. Eli the priest was his teacher. God speaking to people was a rarity at that time. Then one night, Samuel heard the voice of God. However, Samuel didn’t recognize who was speaking to him. Eli taught him to know God’s voice. With Eli’s guidance, this conversation changed. This mentoring moment awakened something in a young boy that would turn him into the prophet who would one day anoint Israel’s first king.

God is still speaking today, and we need godly leaders to help us to hear and know His voice. It is God’s will that someday you would be that kind of guide to someone else who is learning to know God and His voice.

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| **QUESTION**  Can you recall a time when you thought that God was showing you something, but you were unsure? |

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| **QUESTION**  Who in your life can help you become more familiar with God’s voice? |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 3: Moses Learned from Jethro to Delegate Responsibility**

Read [Exodus 18:13–22](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ex18.13-22).

Moses’s father-in-law, Jethro, came to visit. He was pleased to hear all that God has done for Israel. But he wasn’t pleased to hear all that Moses was doing for Israel. He was trying to carry the entire load of leadership on his shoulders! Jethro was able to stand back and objectively see the solution.

Often, we get so bogged down in the daily grind of life that we can’t step back to see a solution that’s right in front of us. Sometimes, what we need from others isn’t a great amount of wisdom. It’s simply an objective voice that can see things from a different point of view.

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| **QUESTION**  What responsibility in your life can no one do but you? What responsibility in your life can you consider giving away to others? Make two lists. |

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| **QUESTION**  Who is a wise and trusted person you could review these lists with to get an objective perspective? |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 4: Elisha’s Servant Learned from Elisha about God’s Power**

Read [2 Kings 6:8–17](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.2Ki6.8-17).

Israel was at war with Aram, and Elisha kept getting in the way of the king’s plans. When the king of Aram learned of this, he was ready to unleash his furry on Elisha. Elisha’s servant was understandably afraid when he saw what was facing them. But Elisha’s faith helped the servant to see that God’s power is stronger than the enemy’s threats.

Many circumstances come into our life so that we feel we are outnumbered against impossible odds. We all need godly leaders to help direct us to the reality that God’s side is always greater than any impossible situation that we may be facing.

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| **QUESTION**  Why do you think that Elisha’s perspective was so different from his servant’s? |

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| **QUESTION**  What impossible situation can you look to a godly leader to help you with? |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 5: Joshua Learned from Moses to Spend Time with God**

Read [Exodus 33:7–11](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ex33.7-11).

Moses had a special relationship with God. It was Moses who heard God speak through a burning bush. It was Moses who climbed a mountain to be with God. It was Moses whose face was radiant after he spent time with God. Joshua watched every day as Moses would spend much time to be with God. We can only speculate about exactly how much Joshua saw and heard, but it must have made a big impact on his life. God put Joshua in charge of Israel when Moses died. Joshua led Israel into the Promised Land.

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| **QUESTION**  Is there a godly leader in your life who would share with you how they spend time with God? |

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| **QUESTION**  Is there a specific location that you could turn into a special place to be with God? |