Field Guide and Leader Guide 11.1.26

The Book of Acts

Synopsis

It is easy to believe someone would make a good Christian when their life already looks respectable. Saul's encounter with Jesus challenges that assumption. He was actively persecuting the church when Jesus met him on the road to Damascus. His transformation reminds us that salvation is never a reward for being good enough. Every one of us needs grace, and no one is beyond Jesus' reach.

Ananias and Barnabas had to respond to what Jesus had done in someone they had every reason to fear. Ananias called Saul "brother," and Barnabas helped the disciples recognize the evidence of his changed life. They did not ignore Saul's past, but they refused to let it have the final word. Their response challenges us to consider whether we are willing to welcome the people Jesus brings into his family, including those we once believed could never change.

Questions

1. When you think about someone becoming a Christian, who seems likely, and who seems unlikely? What do those assumptions reveal about how you understand your own need for grace?
    - How might someone's kindness, success, or outward morality cause us to overlook their need for Jesus?
    - How does remembering who you were apart from Christ change the way you see someone whose sin looks different from yours?
2. Ananias welcomed Saul as a brother, and Barnabas helped others recognize what Jesus had done in his life. What makes it difficult to see someone beyond their past, and how can we recognize genuine transformation without pretending their past never happened?
    - What stands out to you about Ananias calling Saul "brother," knowing the harm Saul had caused?
    - Barnabas pointed to evidence of Jesus' work in Saul's life. What might that evidence look like in someone's life today?
3. Is there someone you have written off as too far from God or unlikely to change? What would it look like to trust Jesus with that person and take a practical step toward reflecting his grace?
    - What makes it difficult for you to believe Jesus could change that person?

- What is one step you could take this week to pray for them, move toward them, or welcome what Jesus is doing in their life?

Scripture References: Acts 9:1–19 | Acts 9:20–27 | Romans 5:6–10

Conclusion

Saul's story should leave us amazed at the grace of Jesus. But that amazement should reach into our own story too. We may not have done what Saul did, but none of us earned a place in God's family. Jesus met us in our sin and offered reconciliation we could never accomplish ourselves. Our hope rests in his mercy, not in how favorably our lives compare with someone else's.

The grace we have received should shape how we respond to others. Welcoming someone does not require us to deny the harm they have caused or ignore the need for discernment. It does require us to remain open to what Jesus can do and willing to recognize his work when it happens. No one is too far for Jesus to reach or for his people to welcome.