

**All One Church**

(based on Acts 15:1–18)

More and more people were starting to follow Jesus. People were hearing the good news and joining the church. It was a very exciting time.

Occasionally there were problems in the new church. Sometimes people disagreed about the best way to follow Jesus. It wasn't long before people in the church began to argue about who could join the church.

"Only those who follow the law of Moses can join the church," proclaimed some people.

"That's rubbish," said others. "Anyone who loves Jesus and trusts him is welcome."

This matter caused so many arguments that the church finally decided to send Paul and Barnabas to meet with Peter, James, and some of the other church leaders. It was their job to decide who could join the church.

"We need an answer," declared the people.

The leaders gathered in Jerusalem and talked for many days. They talked and talked and talked. Then they talked some more. Finally, Peter stood up to speak.

"Friends," Peter announced. "I was sent to tell the good news of Jesus to everyone. Right from the start, it was clear that God did not have favorites. It didn't matter if people were Jewish or anything else. They all received God's gift of the Holy Spirit."

After Peter's speech, Barnabas and Paul stood up and told stories about how God had given them the power to work many wonders and miracles for everyone, not just the people who followed the law of Moses.

A long silence followed. Finally, James stood up and spoke.

"Friends," he said. "We need to stop fighting. God has made it clear that we are all one. We are all God's children, and we all belong to God's family."

So the question was decided. It didn't matter if you followed the law of Moses or you didn't. It didn't matter where you came from or who your parents were. It didn't matter what language you spoke or where you had been born. It didn't matter what shade your skin was. God's love was for everyone. The church was open to all. Everyone was welcome.



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Use one or more activities from each section to explore grace and gratitude with your children this week.

Recognizing God's Grace

- Read and enjoy the story with your children—imagine and wonder.
- Invite everyone to chant “We are all one church” and make welcoming motions after each paragraph when the story is reread.
- Try to identify many ways that people in your church have things in common. This may be the whole church family lives in our town, or it may be certain people have some things in common, such as the Martinez, Lewis, and Velasquez families all speak Spanish at home. Give thanks to God for bringing together so many different people who share things in common.



Responding to God's Grace

- Practice basic hospitality at home, at church, and in the community. Take turns doing things such as opening doors for others, letting someone go first in line, offering a guest a drink of water, or inviting friends to your home.
- Together, research how communities or cultures welcome and show hospitality to others—for example, with flower leis in Hawaii or rose water and a towel to wash hands in Morocco. Choose a unique way to welcome others as a ritual for your home. Make or collect whatever is needed for the ritual of hospitality, such as a welcome sign for the front door, wristbands with a message of love, or fresh-baked bread.
- Take a walking or car trip past different places where people worship, pausing at each one to thank God for the people who worship in each location. If time or opportunity allows, attend a service at a place of worship that is different from your own. Talk about how the faith community showed hospitality.

Celebrating in Gratitude

- Watch the YouTube video “We Are the Church” (bit.ly/WeAreTheChurchSong, 2:39) and sing along with the song.
- Pray this prayer each day this week:

Thank you, God, for all the different people you made. Let us worship you by welcoming others with joy. Amen.

Note: bit.ly web addresses are case sensitive.