

EPHESIANS

GROUP GUIDE: WEEK 3

CONVERSATION STARTER

If you could have one superpower that helped you navigate social situations, what would it be and why?

ERASING THE LINES OF DIVISION

Throughout Ephesians, Paul has teased the idea of this mystery of God that is now being revealed. What is this great mystery? He says, “This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Eph. 3:6).

It’s easy to gloss over this idea as if it’s no big deal. But the magnitude of this statement cannot be overstated. He’s talking about two groups of people who actively hated one another, who erected very real physical and mental barriers against one another. The Jews were an oppressed people, and the Gentiles represented their oppressors. But now, through Jesus and the work of the Spirit, these two groups are being brought together into the same body, heirs to the same promises of God, enjoying the same chosen, adopted status.

This is an absolutely crazy idea! Our culture is full of dividing lines. Rural and urban. Rich and poor. Republican and Democrat. Conservative and progressive. Religious and unreligious. East and West. These dividing lines are often a source of tension and strife, bitterness and conflict. And yet the mystery of the Gospel is that these lines that seek to divide us disappear when it comes to the family of God. All walks of life, all cultures, and experiences are being brought together in Him.

Paul tells us that this unity, the way we live together and love one another despite our differences, is precisely what will reveal God’s wisdom to the rest of the world. As we

follow Jesus, we become the kind of people who tend toward mercy instead of anger, forgiveness instead of vengeance, grace instead of bitterness, and love instead of hate. This kind of unity doesn't come without sacrifice (after all, Paul is in prison because of it!). It will require things of us that are not always easy to give. But what Paul suggests is that there are depths and dimensions to God's love that are impossible to experience if we insulate ourselves from people who are different than us. The only way for us to truly understand the depth of God's love and generosity is to commit to people whom we don't find easy to love.

What could be a greater testament to the expansive, limitless, logic-defying love of God than such a diverse family loving each other as brothers and sisters and equals?

Take a moment to discuss this idea with your group. What are some practical ways you can be intentional over the next few weeks about fostering community with believers who come from different backgrounds or cultures, who think differently, or who are in different life stages than you?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What stuck out to you about the reading from this week? Was there a verse or idea that was particularly meaningful or challenging for you?
2. What does it look like practically to foster community with people we actively don't get along with or dislike? How do we maintain healthy boundaries while also seeking the kind of unity Paul points to in Ephesians?
3. Where do you sense the biggest dividing lines coming from in our culture when it comes to different people groups? What role does the church play in bringing unity in these areas?
4. Paul prays that we would be "rooted and grounded in love" in Eph. 3:17. Years ago we talked about the importance of being people whose roots are outpacing our branches—people who are less concerned with how things look on the outside and more concerned with how things actually are. How is this going for you? Do you find yourself focusing more on your "branches" (what the world sees) or your "roots" (who we are becoming through Jesus)?
5. In Ephesians 3:10, Paul reveals that it is how we live together and love one another that reveals God's wisdom to the world. How does this idea change the way you think about your relationships?
6. As Paul says in Eph. 3:20, God is able to do "far more abundantly than all that we ask or think" through the power of the Spirit within us. How have you seen this play out in your faith journey up to this point? Are there places you're still hoping for God's power to break through?

WEEKLY PRACTICE

Paul ends Ephesians 3 with a powerful prayer in verses 14-21. For our practice this week, we're going to echo this prayer, not just for ourselves but also for our community. This would be a great time to invite others to pray these words with you or to pray them with your family. Before you pray, spend a few minutes in silence quieting your mind. Don't just say the words. Think about what they mean to you and how God might be challenging you as you consider the implications of this powerful prayer both individually and from within a community.

Magnificent Father,

Would you strengthen us by Your Spirit—

Not with a brute strength, but with a strength from within—

That Christ would live in us,

That we would open the door to Jesus in every corner of our life and invite him in.

Would you make known to us in a new way

the magnitude and multifaceted nature of Jesus' love for us all.

Impress upon us what generations before us have marveled in—

The breadth and length and height and depth of Jesus' love,

love that surpasses knowledge,

love that leads to a fulfilled life.

God, you are able to do far more than anything we could ask for or imagine,

through the power of the Holy Spirit within us,

So to you be all the glory!

May all we do in the community of the church,

in the name of Christ Jesus,

for all generations forever and ever

bring honor to Your great and holy name.

Amen.