

For the first few months of 2020, we are working on a new format for Life Group discussion guides. These new guides will still use the Bible passages and topics from the weekend message, but they will also be designed to help your Life Group members learn how to study the Bible on their own. We will be using the acronym HEAR as a way to teach people to read the Bible and to organize these discussion guides. HEAR stands for **H**ighlight the passage, **E**xplain the passage, **A**pply the passage, and **R**espond to the passage.

Each week, there will be a page to print off for each member of your group. The printed sheet will have the Bible passage you'll discuss and some questions in the margins to guide them in examining those verses.

Additionally, there will be a leader's guide that will give you helpful notes on the passage (i.e. background information and definitions) as well as discussion questions to lead your group. These don't need to be printed for each member of your group.

These guides are designed to be discussed BEFORE the sermon, so the group can discuss the passage before the pastor shares his insights. However, they can just as easily be used after the weekend message.

Our hope is these tools will (a) help your group members learn to study/read their Bibles outside of the group and (b) give you a helpful outline for facilitating the group discussion. If you have comments or questions about the new format, we'd love to hear your constructive feedback. Send your feedback to me at josh.taylor@foresthill.org.

In the months of January and February, we will be looking at making first and next steps towards true change in the areas of purpose, mental health, finances, and relationships.

How to Use This Discussion Guide

- Use the summary statement for each week to quickly understand the text's theme. You can use that as a reference point to help guide your discussion or bring it back if your group begins to get off topic.
- Use the prayer prompt at the end of each guide to help you close in prayer.

Additionally, here are some tips and guidelines to help you lead these discussions:

1. **Choose the questions that best fit your group and your time constraints.** There are a lot of questions in this guide and your group may not be able to discuss them all. That's okay! You don't have to ask all of them. Before your group begins, choose the questions that are most likely to help your group understand what God is saying in the text and how to apply it to their lives.
2. **Prepare for your group time by reading the passages and the notes in a study Bible.** A good study Bible can give you some insights into the passages and how they connect to the whole book or the whole story of the Bible.
3. **Begin every group meeting with prayer.** We can only understand and apply God's Word with the help of the Holy Spirit. So, invite the Spirit to open your hearts and minds to what He says to His people.
4. **Keep the conversation focused on Scripture as much as possible.** Some people may want to bring in their opinions or continually refer to what the teaching pastor said during his message. This is helpful in small doses, but the goal of this discussion guide is to help you determine what God is saying in His Word. Encourage the group to continue to return to the Scripture. One way to do that is by saying, "That's a great insight! Where do you see that in the Scripture we're studying?"
5. **Encourage participation, but don't let anyone dominate.** Encourage everyone to share insights, ask questions, and read aloud. But don't allow any one person – even yourself, the leader – to monopolize the time. Some people are just unaware of themselves and how much they speak, so gently encourage them to listen and make space for others to talk.
6. **Help your group members to be specific in the application of Scripture.** It is easy to generalize when we talk about the Bible and how to apply it. So ask your group members specific questions – for example, "What part of the world do you sense God wants you to pray for? How will you do that? How will you make that a habit?"

We pray that you will hear God speak through His Word and that His Spirit will move you to obey Him. The Word of God – the Bible – lets us know the God who loves us and saves us. May this discussion guide help you and your Life Group to become more immersed in His story.

Date of Sermon: February 8-9, 2020

Topic of Sermon: Moving from conflict to peace

Main Passage: Ephesians 2:11-16

BEFORE your group meeting:

- Look up the main passage in a study Bible and read the study notes
- Print off or send the “Group Member Guide” (page 4) for your group members
- Review the “Group Member Guide” for yourself
- Have enough pens for each group member.

ANNOUNCEMENT

January 29, 2020, 6:30pm – Mental Health event looking at Anxiety and Addictions.
Hosted at the South Park campus.
Visit www.foresthill.org

Topic of Life Group Meeting: God’s people demonstrate the power of the gospel when they pursue the unity brought by Jesus.

Icebreakers (optional)

- What are some groups or places in which you have a strong sense of community? (Ex: alma mater, favorite team, town, family, clubs or civic organizations, etc.)
- Up to this point, would you have said that racism is a major issue in the United States? Why or why not?

Leader’s Note: Introduce the next part of the group meeting. You can read this introduction or put it in your own words:

“Today, we’re going to spend a few minutes studying the focal passage on our own before we discuss it as a group. I’ve printed out a copy of the Bible passage for you. There are some questions in the margins to help you. Spend most of your time on the Highlight and Explain questions. Feel free to mark up, underline or highlight the passage. We’ll spend most of our time discussing Ephesians 2:11-16. But when focusing any passage, it’s important to look at the verses before and after it so we can better understand what the verses are saying. So, the printout has some verses before and after our passage. I’m going to give us about 5 minutes to do this. Let me begin by praying that God will open our minds and hearts to His Word.”

When you come back together, use the questions below to guide the discussion.

HIGHLIGHT the Passage

- What key ideas, words or phrases stood out to you from the passage today? What is the significance of those?
- Did this passage raise any questions for you?
- How would you summarize this passage in your own words? Would anyone add anything to that summary?

EXPLAIN the Passage

- What are some things this passage revealed about people?
- Before Jesus came, what problems did the Gentiles face (vv. 11-12)? How do those images compare to your personal history?
- What are some things this passage revealed about God? His nature, His work, or His character?
- What is the change that results because of the “But now” statement in 2:13? What does this statement mean to you?
- How has Christ destroyed hostility and made peace possible for all people (v. 14)?
- According to verses 14-18, what are the positive results of this wall coming down? Which one is the most significant to you and why?

APPLY the Passage

- What truth from this passage do you need to cling to? What makes that truth significant to you?
- By God’s power, what is God calling you to change in how you think, speak, or act?
- What will you do this week to relate to other believers in ways that express your unity in Christ?
- How can this passage help you to share the gospel with those people around you?

RESPOND to the Passage

- Thank God for graciously tearing down the dividing walls of hostility between us and those we deem “other.” Ask God to help us proclaim and demonstrate the gospel by striving for gospel-centered unity.

COMMENTARY NOTES ON THE MAIN PASSAGE

2:11. Paul asked those who were Gentiles to review what their lives had been like at one time, that is, before their salvation. (Gentiles were those who were not Jews either ethnically or religiously. That is, they had not descended from the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and they were not under the Old Testament covenant.) The alienation between Jews and Gentiles was based on observable differences in the flesh of both groups. For example, Jewish males had been marked by the religious ritual of circumcision. This rite symbolized that they belonged to the covenant family. Gentile males had no such mark. This led to an easy way for Jews to indulge in name-calling.

2:12. The terrible Gentile condition extended beyond racial discrimination. They had been deprived of the spiritual blessings that Jews had enjoyed for centuries. Paul mentioned five areas of deficit. (1) Were without the Messiah: the Jews expected a coming King who would rule the world in righteousness. Their Scriptures were clear, and the Gospels show that initially many first-century Jews readily welcomed Jesus because they expected their Messiah to come (John 1:41). (2) Excluded from the citizenship of Israel: the Israelite nation had been founded under God's direction. God was their true King. (3) Were foreigners to the covenants of the promise: God's covenants (solemn agreements) had been made only with Israelites, such as Abraham and David (Gen. 15; 2 Sam. 7). (4) Were without hope: therefore, Gentiles were without the hope that Jews had for the Messiah. Furthermore, they were without any hope of salvation or eternal life. Although God had planned to include Gentiles in His salvation, they knew nothing about it until they heard the gospel. (5) Were without God in the world: the phrase without God also can be translated as "godless." The Gentiles had plenty of gods, but they were without knowledge of the one true God. They had no personal relationship with Him.

2:13. Paul had starkly reminded his Gentile readers that they had been hopeless and godless before their salvation. Or, as he put it in this verse, Gentiles had been far away from God. The words *But now* mark a transition. Because through faith Gentiles now are in Christ, the past deprivation is gone. They have now been brought near. Paul explained the means by which this happened: the blood of the Messiah. Only by the atoning death of the Jewish Messiah could Gentiles (or Jews, for that matter) come into a right and near relationship with God. In these verses Paul spoke both to Gentile believers ("you") and to Jewish Christians ("we"). He described how both groups have been joined together into God's new people.

2:14. Hostility (antagonism) characterized the natural relationship between Jews and Gentiles. Paul taught that peace (cessation of hostility, harmonious friendship) summarizes the supernatural relationship between these groups, brought about because He (the Messiah) removed the barriers between them. Through His death, Jesus made both groups one. Where there had been two hostile parties—Jews and Gentiles—there was now a third possibility, the body of Christ.

2:15. The main issue separating Jew and Gentile was the law of the commandments in regulations. By this Paul referred to the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament, such as those concerning sacrifices, dietary restrictions, and ritual cleanness (see also Col. 2:16-17). Jesus did not abolish the moral laws of the Old Testament. These laws show how God's people ought to live. Furthermore, even moral laws were never intended by God as a means for salvation (see Rom. 3:20). Ceremonial Jewish regulations were done away with by His death; they were shadows pointing forward to His coming. Now that Jesus has come, the shadows have vanished in His light. He has now created one new man—a new humanity—from the two old groups, Jews and Gentiles. In Christ, there is now peace both between Jews and Gentiles as well as between humans and God.

2:16. Not only did Jews and Gentiles need to be reconciled to each other, but members of both groups—sinners all—needed to come into right relationship with God. Thus, Jesus died also so that He might reconcile both groups to God. He did this by dying for them in one body, the church (5:25).

2:17. Jesus' death did not automatically unite all Jews and all Gentiles into one body; neither did it automatically reconcile all persons to God. Yet His death was essential. Paul now turned to another essential ingredient to the gospel—its proclamation. Both Jews and Gentiles needed to hear the message of reconciliation and respond to it. At Jesus' coming, He first proclaimed peace to those who were near, that is, to the Jews. Historically, the gospel came first to them. Through the apostles and the early Christian preachers, the message was also declared to the Gentiles, who were far away (Rom. 1:16).

2:18. The death of Jesus is the only means by which we both—Jews and Gentiles—have access to God. Although Jews had been near, they did not think of themselves as having intimate access to God. The entire sacrificial system reminded them of their sins and the unapproachable holiness of God. Now all believers can come to God intimately, as our Father. Our connection to God is granted by one Spirit, given alike to all believers, whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, free or slave, rich or poor.

Life Group Member Guide

Focal Passage: Ephesians 4:13-16 (ESV)

Passage in Context: Ephesians 2:4-22 (ESV)



Bible-Reading Tip: Define your key terms using a study Bible or Bible dictionary. In this passage, Gentiles (called “the uncircumcision”) were non-Jewish people who did not abide by Jewish Law or traditions. There was a sense of racism between Jews (also called “the circumcision”) and Gentiles because the Jews believed Gentiles should follow the Jewish law in order to be considered for admission into the family of the Jewish Messiah, Jesus.

⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

¹¹ **Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—¹² remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.**

HEAR Bible Reading Method

HIGHLIGHT the passage

- Underline any repeated words or key ideas you see.
- Note any questions you have about what you read.
- In 2-3 sentences, summarize what was said or what happened.

EXPLAIN the passage

- What was revealed about God? His character, desires, and/or actions?
- What was revealed about people? What we are/do or what we should be/do?

APPLY the passage

- From this reading, what truth do you need to embrace?
- By God’s power, how will you THINK, SPEAK, or ACT differently based on what you read?

RESPOND to the passage

- Talk to God about what you’ve seen and learned in this passage.
- Ask Him to help you apply the truth to your life.