



GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Almost two thousand years ago, Paul wrote a letter to the church in Ephesus. It was a powerful message that called the community of faith to a new way of life rooted in the unity and wisdom that could only be found through Christ. What was true then is still true today. Will we follow the path that leads to the renewed life this ancient letter promises?

This guide is designed for individual or group use. Sermons in this series are available at MiddletownChristian.org/Sermons.

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Week 1: September 11, 2022

Key Scripture: Ephesians 1:1-23

Christians often refer to themselves as children of God, and the letter to the church in Ephesus makes it clear how special that relationship is and to whom it is available. It is a good news message, but in the ancient world it was also controversial. In some ways, it still is.

Discussion Questions:

1. The church in Ephesus was comprised primarily of Gentiles, which simply means “non-Jewish.” The letter argues that through Christ, there is no longer a difference between Jew and Gentile. Why was that good news for Gentiles, but a struggle for those with a Jewish background?
2. A primary purpose of Ephesians is to explain and celebrate that through Christ, we have been adopted as children of God. Why was this language so striking to its original audience? (Hint: It points to the realities of an important Roman law).
3. Once adoption takes place, there is no legal distinction between biological or adopted children. But that doesn't mean that all distinctions disappear. When you think of adoption, what comes to mind?
4. Part of the struggle for the Jewish community was the message that as adopted children of God, every Christian was entitled to the same inheritance in Christ. People often fear something like an inheritance being shared among a larger group and fear that there will be less for each person. Why is this not true when it comes to the inheritance we receive from God?
5. As a church, we seek to live into the call of Ephesians to share a love for “all of God's people” (1:15-16). How does our church live into that call that you consider successful? How might we improve living into that call?

Week 2: September 18, 2022

Key Scripture: Ephesians 2-3

One core message in Ephesians is that there is no hierarchy in the body of Christ. The grace of the cross is given to everyone equally. The re-born prince is no better than the re-born pauper. In a society that has become increasingly polarized, this message is important for us to remember even when it is hard to practice.

Discussion Questions:

1. After stating that through Christ we are all equal, Paul explains why that is true. He starts by talking about the equality we all have through death in sin. What makes us “equal” in that death?
2. After declaring our equality through death in sin, Paul states that we also have equality in life through Christ. What does that mean? How did it effect the early church?
3. Despite Paul’s teaching in Ephesians, a letter that has been guiding the church for almost 2000 years, there appears to be more division among Christians now than ever before. In what ways do you see that division?
4. According to Paul, to understand the fullness of God, we must be a church that reflects the wisdom of God in all of its “rich variety.” What does that mean? How does a “rich variety” of people help us see the fullness of God?
5. One way of keeping the spirit of Paul’s teaching is that we stay open to learning about God from people different from ourselves. How is that beneficial? How is it difficult? What are some ways we can do this?

Week 3: September 25, 2022

Key Scripture: Ephesians 4:1-16

The letter to the Ephesians was written to a diverse church and had to address the challenges that come with that diversity so that there could be greater unity. Finding that kind of unity was not only challenging in the ancient world, but it is also challenging today.

Discussion Questions:

1. Read Ephesians 4:1-3. What does this passage say about how we are called to live out our faith amid diversity? What are some specific ways this can be done within the church?
2. To understand the changes that are happening in the church at the time this letter was written, Brian shares some important facts about the church at that time. What does he say about the function of Temple? What about the function of the priest?
3. What is the importance of the following passage? “Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.” (Mark 15:37-38)
4. As part of the body of Christ, every baptized Christian has been called to ministry. Paul states that “every ligament” must be working together for God’s glory on earth. What active part in ministry are you taking? In what ways would you like to increase your role in the body of Christ?

Week 4: October 2, 2022

Key Scripture: Ephesians 4:17-5:20

To this point, the letter to the Ephesians has focused on how the church community can better live into the call of faith. Now, the letter shifts to how individuals are called to do so. This week, the letter is about to get personal.

Discussion Questions:

1. After speaking to the church community, Ephesians begins to address faith on an individual level, saying that if we are going to be Christ followers, we must change our way of living. It begins this argument by stating that the Gentiles in Ephesus need to stop living as Gentiles. What does Paul mean by that? How does this teaching relate to baptism?
2. In what ways is it more difficult for a lifelong Christian to die to themselves and take on a new life in Christ? In what ways might lifelong Christians be ignorant or hard hearted toward our faith?
3. Beginning at 4:26, Ephesians gives a list of instructions for Christian living. Which of those instructions do you find most helpful? Which ones are the most difficult?
4. At the end of his sermon Brian shared the following quote, “Don’t be a part time Christian who demands a full time God.” What does that quote mean? How well do you live into its challenge? What can you do to increase your full-time effort of discipleship?

Week 5: October 9, 2022

Key Scripture: Ephesians 5:21-6:9

As Christians, our faith is supposed to shape everything about our lives, including our families. The letter to the Ephesians offers some very specific, and sometimes controversial, advice about what that looks like.

Discussion Questions:

1. Brian began his sermon by sharing a passage that can spark a variety of responses. How do you respond when you hear the words from Ephesians 5:22?
2. As an example of why it is important to read scripture in its entirety, Brian showed how two different Bibles print the beginning of today's passage. How could these differences impact your interpretation of this passage? How can you prevent becoming "victim" to misunderstanding scripture by such editorial decisions?
3. One of the keys to interpreting what many refer to as the "household codes" in scripture is to be aware of the ancient family structure that existed when they were written. What are some of these differences? How do those differences shape the way you interpret this passage?
4. The household code offers some specific instructions to families with children. What are the rules that can be found there?
5. Name one way that you will seek to become more Christ centered in terms of your familial relationships?

Week 6: October 16, 2022

Key Scripture: Ephesians 6:10-24

Being a Christian in the ancient world wasn't easy. It's not always easy in the modern world. As the letter to the Ephesians reaches its end, we get some advice on how we can maintain our faith amid the challenges we face.

Discussion Questions:

1. The letter to the Ephesians serves a very important function for the church. It reminds us how we are supposed to live as a community of faith, both as a body and as individuals in that body. It also has a more cosmic purpose - to reconcile the world with God. God accomplished this through the work of Jesus Christ (1:20-23). Even though the victory is won, we still have a role to play. What is that role?
2. How do you name/define/understand the powers that we have been called to fight as Christians?
3. To help us understand how to prepare for the spiritual struggles/battles in our life, the letter uses the imagery of the Roman Soldier. The letter re-defines the purpose of each piece of the soldier's uniform, calling it the "armor of God." Why do you think Ephesians uses that language? In what ways do you find it helpful? In what ways do you find it challenging?
4. As we wrap up our series on Ephesians, what are some things you have learned along the way that you'd like to develop as you move forward in faith?