



NG Study Guide: Eph. 2:11-22 "United" [11.12.17]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. **Leader note:** *Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

The Study

Thesis: Spiritual life is to be lived in community. Our culture yearns for community. We seek to create it in the virtual world, at bars, parties, and sporting events but often we have a sense that we are lacking genuine community. God created us for community with Him and others. We are hard-wired for community, but our culture is disconnected from God and others. Jesus removes barriers between you and God, and you and others so that you can experience unity with God and others. Today we'll discover how to experience true community in Christ and why.

1. Jesus unites people with God [11-13]

Spiritual pride and fear alienate people from God and a community of faith. The Jews were chosen by God to bring the Messiah into the world and were to be a light to the Gentiles to bring them to God [Is. 42:6]. The Jews had entered a sacred covenant [12] (Old Testament) with God. The covenant provides separate customs, religion, diet, dress, worship, and promised blessings [12]. The Sabbath was the sign of the covenant, but circumcision [11] was the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham the Father of the Jewish people [12]. Jews were proud of their special relationship with God. But instead of seeking to be a light to the Gentiles they looked down upon them and called them uncircumcised [11, 1Sam. 17:2].

You can be brought near to God through faith in Christ. Gentiles (non-Jews), and unbelievers generally, were without Christ [12] in the sense there was no expectation of Messiah as a Deliverer. They were aliens and strangers to the covenant [12] and thus strangers to God's promises, and the blessings of God's rule in their lives. They had no basis for any meaningful hope of eternal life with God nor any meaningful relationship with God in this life [12]. Ephesus had pagan gods and was the center of worship of the fertility goddess Diana. Yet, their spirituality, like any spirituality apart from Christ, provided no meaningful basis for true love, hope, or contentment. But now, you who once were disconnected from God can be brought near to God through faith in Christ's sacrifice upon the cross

[13]. Jesus paid the penalty for your sin that separates you from God. Being united with God changes your life forever. You discover hope in the promises of God, and experience transformation to become more like Jesus.

Community with God can be difficult, but the benefits justify the effort. It requires time to forge relationship with God who is very different from man. It is not convenient, sometimes uncomfortable, and it is challenging. It requires us to sacrifice our desires and put God's desires before our own. It requires the spiritual disciplines of Bible learning, prayer, and solitude.

2. Jesus unites people who were once separated from each other [14-18]

Jesus brings peace between Jew and Gentile to unite them in the Church. Jesus Himself is our peace [14]. He is the source of peace and the means to peace between man and God, and between men. What does it mean that Jesus has broken down the wall of separation [14]? The temple area had four courtyards descending to the east: priests, Israel (Jewish men), Jewish women and Gentiles. There was a four-foot wall that separated Gentiles from Jews. Paul, about three years earlier, was nearly lynched by a Jewish mob that thought he brought a Gentile into the courtyard of Jewish men [Ac. 21:27-31]. This helps us to appreciate the enmity and sense of separation between Jews and Gentiles. Jesus abolished that separation once and forever [14]. At the cross, Jesus fulfilled all the requirements of the ceremonial law that had separated Jews and non-Jews [15]. Thus, Jew and Gentile are united as one through faith in Christ. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female; for we are now all one in Christ Jesus" [Gal. 3:28]. The Greek term translated "create" [15] refers to creating something distinct, and the term translated "new" [15] refers to a different kind or quality. Jesus proclaimed peace to Gentiles who were far from God and to Jews who were near [17]. Through Jesus all believers have the same access to the Father by the Holy Spirit [18].

Jesus' Church is distinct in unifying divergent people with God and one another. The Church is unlike anything before or since. Jesus has united people who were previously separated from God and people who were once separated from one another into one body [16]. People who were (or are) very different in their worldview, customs, beliefs, values, preferences, behaviors, and attitudes are united in Christ. Your ability to forge and preserve the unity created by the Spirit [Eph. 4:1-3] with people who are different than you are great tests of your unity with God.

3. Jesus unites us in community [19-22]

Jesus' followers are fit together to display the house of God. Believers are no longer strangers [19]. The Greek term *xenoi* translated strangers refers to transients with no rights. Similarly, believers are no longer foreigners. The Greek *parakloi* referred to aliens who paid taxes but had limited rights. But believers are fellow citizens or partakers with full privileges. Paul likens the community of faith as a temple. The temple was the center of Jewish worship and life for more than a thousand years. The house of God is the church or the assembled people of God who are called to life in community with one another. The foundation of this house is the sound doctrine of the apostles and prophets [20]. It is Jesus who builds and the house [Matt. 16:18]. And He is the chief cornerstone that holds it together [Is. 28:16, Ps. 118:2, 1Pet.2:4-5]. "I write to you so that you may know how to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" [1Tim. 3:15]. The church is the pillar and ground of truth. It is to display the truth of the gospel like a pillar, high for all to see, and it is to be sure and stable in biblically true doctrine as the ground or foundation. As believers are fit together the whole grows into a holy temple in the Lord [21]. In essence, an assembled people or community of faith set-apart to God. And this assembly is where God will uniquely manifest His presence by His Spirit [22]. The unity of community is emphasized by the terms "one" [14,15,16], "fit together" [21], and "built together" [22].

Community with other believers can be difficult, but the benefits justify the effort. It requires time to forge relationships with people who are often very different than you. It is not convenient, sometimes uncomfortable, it

is challenging and can even be difficult. It requires us to sacrifice our desires and put the needs of others before our own.

Why is community in Christ essential?

1. You'll know that you are united with Christ.
2. You'll experience Christian life.
3. You'll glorify God by displaying the gospel and God's unique love to others.

Are you experiencing true community with Christ and other believers? Here are some practical ideas:

1. Community with God grows from spiritual disciplines of Bible learning, prayer, and solitude.
2. Community with others grows from gathering as a community to worship on weekends, and creating time to befriend and build relationships. And scattering as small groups to develop authentic relationships during the week.

Study Guide Qs

1. How can spiritual pride and fear alienate people from God and a community of faith?

2. In Bible times, there was a separation or division between Jews and Gentiles, men and women, and free and slave. What are some of the divisions in our culture? Why do you think these divisions exist?

3. What are some of the challenges of creating meaningful community with believers who are different from you?

4. What are some of the benefits of authentic community with God and others that you've experienced?

"Digging Deeper" (optional or alternative study)

1. Research the separation of Jews and Gentiles in Bible times. In light of this separation, how radical is unity in Jesus between these groups?

2. The gospel declares unity and equality between the previously divided groups: Jews and Gentiles, male and female, free and slave [Gal. 3:28, Eph. 2:11-22]. How does the gospel radically elevate the standing of previously marginalized people in the Church unlike any other religion of the day?

Love your neighbor *outside* the group better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors where they live, work, study, or play this past week?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor outside the group?
3. Here is a neighboring idea(s) for us to consider for the week(s) ahead:

Pray and ask God how you can express gratitude to your neighbors in connection with the Thanksgiving Holiday. Consider a card, or note, or perhaps a gift.

Love your neighbor *inside* the group better:

1. Are there some needs in our group that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor within the group?
2. What might we do about that need to help?

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

1. Seek to involve as many group participants as possible. A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.

2. Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.

3. The "Digging Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities. As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Digging Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.

4. Every time you meet consider asking:

a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing? If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.