



SERMON STUDY GUIDE

"Experiencing Grace"

For the sermon preached on 10/6:

"Invited"

From the text:

Ephesians 3:8-19

How to use the Groups Study Guide

Hello Leaders! Thank you for your ongoing commitment to pursue Christian community and the study of Scripture—study that leads to life transformation in Christ and strives to serve "the other."

These studies have been designed with the following aspects in mind:

1. To facilitate a discussion on the passage of Scripture that was preached that particular Sunday using the Inductive Bible Study Method. In summary, this method stresses "**Observation**" (what the reader can see from the text), "**Interpretation**" (what we can learn when we study the text with various tools, commentaries, and resources), and "**Application**" (how we can apply the Scripture to our lives).
2. Groups using this study range from the new leader to the highly experienced. Groups themselves have their own context. This study attempts to hit the middle. The stronger studies require about an hour of leader preparation to contextualize this resource to the needs and personalities of your group. It's recommended that you rephrase the questions to match your voice and have an understanding of the interpretive questions as you prepare to lead and facilitate.
3. In addition to prep time, please spend time in prayer during preparation and before and after the study. It's the power of the Holy Spirit that illuminates the Word of Scripture and we are humbled that He uses our combined efforts as part of this work. (For more tips on using this study, please see the endnotes.)

As always, we are so grateful for you, your gifting, your servant leadership, and all that you do for the cause of Christ. Please let us know if we can help you in any way.

Grace and peace,

Pastor Tim, on behalf of the Group Life Team

We are in the second half our teaching series, "Experiencing Grace" where we have learned about grace in worship, in community, in serving and now the grace found in inviting others to the Christian journey. Inviting others takes on a few forms. Certainly, you can invite people to a service, but you can also practice hospitality by inviting people into your home, and even more, inviting people into your life as you journey through the Christian life.

But we often find this difficult and maybe even impractical to our lives as they are ordered. So let's begin our time by exploring some of these challenges and then look at our text, Ephesians 3, and pray the Lord will meet us as we move deeper into Scripture and conversation.

Starting with the obvious, why do many of us find it difficult to invite people to church, to our homes and to other parts of life? And what do you think are the deeper hidden reasons we are hesitant to invite our friends and acquaintances? (So if it helps to drive the conversation deeper, imagine you actually had more time, why would it still be a challenge to invite our friends?)

Let's look at the text that was preached on Sunday and see what else we can discover.

⁸ Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ,⁹ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. ¹⁰ His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹ according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹² In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. ¹³ I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:8-19

O – God's chosen instrument to the Gentiles, Paul, is highly gifted in many ways, including his intelligence. However, it's fair to say he's a bit wordy. How would you summarize what the "Apostle of run-on sentences" says in verses 8-12?

I – Why is Paul choosing this section in Ephesians to remind his readers of the universal and powerful message of the gospel? (Hints can be found in verses 13-15).
(Despite Paul's sufferings, and despite the hardships found in the Christian journey, for every follower, there is purpose, freedom, and joy in pursuing Jesus' mission.)

I – Verse 16-18 are beautiful and powerful words of Scripture. How would you describe the "glorious riches" described in verse 16? Second, take a moment reflecting in your

heart of how wide and long and high and deep the love of Christ has changed you. How would you put that love in words, and even actions (maybe through service, worship, expressions of hospitality, and care)?

O – (A. Returning to verse 10, identify the plan and the calling of how Jesus’ redemptive message will be proclaimed to the powers of the world. **(B.** After you answer that, how is this different than how these “proclamations” are usually made in the ancient or the modern world?

(A. Verse 10 identifies “the church.”

(B. In the ancient world, often such proclamations were made top-down from rulers to other rulers and then announced to the people and then enforced by power and swords and fear of punishment. Christianity was a different type of movement. An invitational and inspiring movement and that’s among the key reasons the early church grew and spread, even in the midst of persecution.)

A– Describe an experience where you were invited to a church service, or an event, a retreat, or a small group where you encountered the redemptive message of Jesus. What impact did it have on you?

And describe a time when you invited someone to something similar – what did you learn from that experience?

I/A – What is your initial reaction to these statistics Pastor Tom mentioned:

- “79% of unchurched people say that if a friend of theirs really values their faith, they don’t mind talking about it.
- 33% of all people who don’t go to church say they are **LIKELY TO ATTEND** a **CHURCH REGULARLY** at **SOME TIME** in the **FUTURE**.
- Over 50% of those asked suggested the **MOST EFFECTIVE INVITATION** to **CHURCH** would come from a **FAMILY MEMBER** or a **CLOSE FRIEND**.”

A – Recall our opening time as we shared the challenges of inviting others and considering these statistics, what ways can we grow in inviting others to the Christian journey, whether it be to a Sunday service or to our homes, and other expressions of hospitality?

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- a. Please note that not all these questions might be able to be asked in a single meeting. Take some time to prayerfully discern what will serve your group the best. Select and reword the questions that best fit your voice and your group.

- b. Complement these questions with “process questions” (what else? what more? what do others think?).
- c. When you ask questions, give people ample time to think and respond. Wait. Take your time; don’t rush people but encourage participation. Avoid answering your own questions!
- d. Application: Pace the study to conclude with difference-making application.
- e. Secondary texts—use other texts sparingly, even if they are relevant. Such texts will push you into “teaching” rather than facilitating, causing people to feel distracted or de-powered.