



GOD'S NEW SOCIETY

The book of ephesians

EEF discipleship guide

Jan 8 – Feb 26, 2012

How to use this Discipleship Guide booklet:

This booklet provides some material so we can interact with the themes each week outside the Sunday gathering. Each week includes a summary of the main idea, questions for reflection and sometimes related Bible passages. You can use it in a number of different ways:

- Use by yourself in your personal devotions or study
- Use with your community group
- Use with your family or housemates to have a regular devotional time together.

In whatever way you use this, our prayer is that you will be helped to grow deeper with the Lord Jesus as you “let the Word of Christ dwell in your richly” (Col. 3:16).

Week of January 8. Rooted and Established in Love (Eph 3:14-21)

Toward the end of his section about the new community, Paul begins to pray. And the thing he prays for is love. Specifically, that we would more profoundly comprehend the amazing size and scale of God's love for us in Christ. He prays that we the member of this new community would together know the dimensions of Christ's love, so we can filled with the power we need to be the community he calls us to be. It takes the whole people of God together to understand the whole love of God, with all their varied backgrounds and experiences. He finally ends this section with a doxology, a praise to God, who alone can make this dream come true.

Questions for reflection:

1. Read Eph 3:14-19 and list out all the request that are in this prayer. What repeated themes do you notice?
2. Paul begins the prayer with "for this reason." What was the reason for Paul's prayer?
3. Of all the things Paul prays for, why does he ask that Christ might dwells more deeply in their hearts? Why is love such an important element of Paul's prayer for others?
4. Paul says we can only more fully comprehend all the dimensions of Christ's love "with all the saints". How does experiencing Christ with others increase our own knowledge and experience of Christ that we cannot receive individually? How do you see this at work in EEF?
5. How does this prayer demonstrate the centrality of the church in God's plan?
6. How can you live out this passage personally and with others?
7. Spend some time praying this prayer for yourself and for EEF.

Week of January 15. Unity of the Spirit (Eph 4:1-6)

Paul is winding down his section on the New Community. He moves now from instruction about what God has done to create this New Community, to what we must do now in response. And his main exhortation is for UNITY. He emphasizes in this section that because of what Jesus has accomplished, in God's sight there is only ONE church which is his family made up of many nations. Yet the fact is we are divided by so many factors and factions. So Paul appeals here that we must be eager to do everything in our power to maintain the visible unity of this community for the sake of Christ.

Questions for reflection:

1. How does Paul emphasize the One-ness and unity of the Church in this section, at least as God sees it? In verses 4-6 Paul repeats the word "one" seven times and three of those refer to the persons of the Trinity. How does God's unity relate to our Christian unity?
2. Paul mentions 4 characteristics in verse 2- humility, gentleness, patience and forbearance. How do practicing each of these promote unity in the body?
3. In verse 3 Paul says "to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit". If Paul is so certain that God has made the church One (verse 4), why is he urging believers so strongly to maintain its one-ness?
4. Where have you experienced the division of the church the most? What affect has that had on you?
5. How can you apply this text to your life and to our community?

Week of January 22. More than We Imagine. (3:20-4:6 review)

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” (Eph 3:20-21)

1. What is the “un-imaginable” thing that Paul believed God was accomplishing through his power?
2. What un-imaginable things is God calling us to dream about for our EEF community and for our neighborhood and city?

Week of January 29. Fifth Sunday.

Every fifth Sunday we cease from our normal Large Gathering and do something “outward” focused that emphasizes that EEF is not primarily a meeting but rather a Christ-centered community in mission. This Sunday we encourage you to gather with your community group in your homes and think of a creative way to reach out to your neighbors. Host a chili party, a game night, go door to door, etc.

Week of February 5, 12 and 19. Grace for Each of Us. (Eph 4:7-16)

We will spend several weeks looking at these important verses together because they are vital for our community. The unity that Paul has been emphasizing does not mean uniformity. On the contrary, the unity of the church is extremely diverse. But here the emphasis is not on the diversity of personalities or cultures but the diversity of gifts that Jesus has given to the people who make up the body. These gifts are called "Charismata," which literally means, "gifts of grace," that Paul says Christ has given to each person so that we can all put them to use in different ways for the sake of the whole body. The emphasis here is that "ministry" is not the work that the pastors or spiritual elite do, but that each person in the family of God is called to do for the sake of the whole.

Questions for reflection

1. Read Eph 4:7-16 through carefully. How is Paul trying to emphasize that unity does not mean uniformity?
2. Where does Paul say that the spiritual gifts come from?
3. Look at each of the gifts that Paul mentions in verse 11 and think about them as different inclinations of each Christian. Read these descriptions from Alan Hirsch and think about the spiritual influence and inclination God has given you. Talk about it with your group. Why is it so important that all five of these kinds of people are at work in the Christian community? What happens if one of them is missing?

APOSTLES extend the gospel. As the “sent ones,” they ensure that the faith is transmitted from one context to another and from one generation to the next. They are always thinking about the future, bridging barriers, establishing the church in new contexts, developing leaders, networking trans-locally. Yes, if you focus solely on initiating new ideas and rapid expansion, you can leave people and organizations wounded. The shepherding and teaching functions are needed to ensure people are cared for rather than simply used.

PROPHETS know God's will. They are particularly attuned to God and his truth for today. They bring correction and challenge the dominant assumptions we inherit from the culture. They insist that the community obey what God has commanded. They question the status quo. Without the other types of leaders in place, prophets can become belligerent activists or, paradoxically, disengage from the imperfection of reality and become other-worldly.

EVANGELISTS recruit. These infectious communicators of the gospel message recruit others to the cause. They call for a personal response to God's redemption in Christ, and also draw believers to engage the wider mission, growing the church. Evangelists can be so focused on reaching those outside the church that maturing and strengthening those inside is neglected.

SHEPHERDS nurture and protect. Caregivers of the community, they focus on the protection and spiritual maturity of God's flock, cultivating a loving and spiritually mature network of relationships, making and developing disciples. Shepherds can value stability to the detriment of the mission. They may also foster an unhealthy dependence between the church and themselves.

TEACHERS understand and explain. Communicators of God's truth and wisdom, they help others remain biblically grounded to better discern God's will, guiding others toward wisdom, helping the community remain faithful to Christ's word, and constructing a transferable doctrine. Without the input of the other functions, teachers can fall into dogmatism or dry intellectualism. They may fail to see the personal or missional aspects of the church's ministry.

4. Along with this list, there are also four other lists of spiritual gifts in the New Testament, listing more than twenty distinct gifts (Romans 12:6-8, 1 Cor. 12:29-30, 1 Cor 12:8-10, 1 Cor. 12:28). The nature of the lists suggest that there are many and not all are even represented in these lists. Read through the lists and talk about which you see at work in each other and in our community.
5. What does Paul say is the purpose of these gifts (v.12-16)? What does he mean by the building up of the body of Christ, according to verses 13;16?
6. How well do you think our community fulfils Paul's vision of every member expressing a vital ministry in the church? How could we grow in this area?
7. How are you and your community going to live this text out this week?

Week of February 26. No Longer Infants. (Eph 4:14-16)

Paul says the ultimate goal for the church is MATURITY. That we would no longer be spiritual infants, tossed about by every new idea and inclination, but would be fully mature in Christ. Paul seems to suggest in this passage that maturity flows from two different sources: truth and love. Truth is the growth in our knowledge of the gospel and all that God has done for us in Christ, and love is the ability to express that truth to and with one another in interdependence and peace. Few communities are able to balance both of these together- but this is what God wants from us.

Questions for reflection:

1. What do these verses teach about the characteristics of maturity and immaturity? How does this differ from the way we normally think about maturity?
2. "Truth becomes hard if it is not softened by love; love becomes soft if is not strengthened by truth." (John Stott). Can you think of examples where this balance of love and truth has been lost in the church? Can you think of examples where you have seen this balance at work? How can we hold them together better in our community?
3. Share with each other your hopes for how you might grow in spiritual maturity this year and ask for prayer and God's help in getting there.
4. How are you and your community going to live this text out this week?