



Week 3: Two Ways to Walk Ephesians 2:1-10

GOAL:

To recognize and live the new life we have by faith in Christ.

CHECKLIST

- Reach out individually to anyone who did not attend last week. Let them know that you missed them and would love to see them this week.
- Prepare for your group meeting by praying for yourself and your group (feel free to use the prayer below) and reading through this Leader's Guide.
- Finalize the date for your Grow Group Prayer Night and send the date to Amy.
- Take attendance in Planning Center, including guests/new members (please include their names and contact info in the meeting notes section). Help new members register for your group using the QR code in your room or at vrbc.net/grow.

PREPARING THROUGH PRAYER:

Loving Father, who is rich in mercy and grace, we praise you for who you are and thank you for your saving work in our lives. As we read and discuss these verses today, we ask you to open our minds to understand the message and soften our hearts to humbly accept the free gift of salvation you offer through faith in Jesus. Teach us how to walk in the way of your kingdom because we are your handiwork created in Christ Jesus to joyfully do the good deeds you have already planned for us to do. Amen.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

CONNECT, COORDINATE, & PRAY

Welcome and introduce anyone who is new this week. Use this time to connect with your group relationally - both formally and informally. Consider using an icebreaker to help the group engage with one another. You could ask something like, "What's your favorite thing about your family?" or "If you had a free day next week to spend however you'd like, what would you do?" Invite them also share any prayer requests.

If you haven't already, decide on a date in October or early November for your Grow Group Prayer Night. Be sure everyone marks this date on their calendars. Email Amy with your date also. (Thanks!)

Spend time praying for your group members and for your time together today.

DISCUSS

- What words would you use to describe your lifestyle based on how you use your time, abilities, and resources?

Read Ephesians 2:1-3.

- In these verses Paul presents two ways of living or, as Pastor John said, two ways of walking. Paul starts by describing life apart from knowing God through Jesus Christ. What words or phrases describe this way of life?

Leaders: *This discussion is an important one for both believers and non-believers alike. If you have people in your group who are exploring who Jesus is and how to follow him, this is the perfect opportunity to present the gospel! For those who are already followers of Jesus, this discussion can be a time of deepening their understanding of who God is making them to be by his grace and considering how he has already prepared a new way of life for them to live.*

- What does it mean to be "dead in sin?" What are some ways the world influences you? What results from this type of living?

Leaders: *Paul lays out in verses 1-3 what life is like apart from God and the spiritual condition from which Jesus saves us. He starts by telling us that we are all spiritually dead because of our transgressions and sin. Isaiah 53:6 describes us as sheep who have gone astray and turned to our own way. Romans 3:22-23 tells us there is no difference between Jew or Gentile because every person has fallen short of God's glory.*

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The word “transgression” indicates wrong steps we take or the deliberate breaking of the law. “Sin” carries the connotation of missing the mark of what God first intended for us. These attitudes and actions aren’t just every-once- in-a- while kind of occurrences. Rather, they are a way of life or a pattern that is developed by the choices we make which can be influenced by the world in which we live. Pastor John characterized this in his sermon as walking in the world.

Walking in the way of the world can be described by disobedience, gratifying the cravings of the flesh and following its desires and thoughts. One commentator said Paul meant more than the physical body when he used the word “flesh”. For him flesh was the whole personality apart from the control of the Spirit.

Romans 6:20-21 says, “When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of?” We often think about being free from the control of sin, but this verse reverses that by focusing on being free from the control of righteousness, walking in the world, living any way we desire which impacts our relationship with God and other people.

What is the result of that kind of living? In Ephesians 2:3 Paul says we are deserving of wrath. He says in Romans 3:23 the wages of sin is death. Years ago, someone said that sin takes us farther than we ever thought we would go, keeps us longer than we ever thought we would stay, and costs us more than we wanted to pay.

Read Ephesians 2:4-7.

- If the story ended with verse three, things would look grim. But two words change everything: **But God!** What has God done for us knowing we have turned our backs on him and chosen to live our own way? What causes Him to do these things for us?

Leaders: This is the moment when shouts of “Praise God” could break forth because God takes spiritually dead people and makes us alive in Christ. Why would he do that when we have chosen to live a life that wasn’t anything like he had planned for us? Take time to unpack the meaning behind three key, yet familiar words that tell us about this God who has come to save us from an old, destructive way of life.

The first word is **love – agape**. The English word “love” is inadequate to capture the fullness of the love Paul is talking about here. The Greeks had four words for different kinds of love. Agape love is the highest form of love that is unconditional, unending, and desiring the very best for the recipient. Because of this great love God has for us, he sent his only son to save us (John 3:16). Ephesians 2:1-3 tell us why we need this great love. God wants us to thrive and live a new life that is completely different from the old one that leads to death. This new life is ours when we believe in Jesus and give our lives to him.

The second word is **mercy**. Did you ever get caught doing something you weren’t supposed to?

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WEEK 3

Think about your last traffic ticket. What do you hope the policeman will do? Withhold from you the ticket you deserve that carries with it a hefty fine and points against your license? Of course, you want mercy. You don't want to get what you deserve!

Because God is rich in mercy, he withholds from us what we rightly deserve and puts our punishment on the Son he loves. The last phrase of Isaiah 53:6 tells us the "LORD has laid on him [Jesus] the iniquity of us all."

*And that brings us to the third word – **grace**. Mercy **withholds** from us **what we deserve**. Grace **gives** us **what we don't deserve**. Grace is experienced in the utter generosity of God forgiving our sin and providing the power that enables us to live a new kind of life which Pastor John called the "Way of the Kingdom".*

Read Ephesians 2:8-10.

- Because of what Jesus has done for us, we learn a new way to walk or live. Think about the relationship between God's gift of grace and receiving it by faith. What is faith to you?

Leaders: *Even the most moral, kind, and generous person on the planet who doesn't know Jesus is still in need of God's saving grace. From a human perspective, we might reason that being good is enough. But God doesn't use a human perspective. The depth of our sin requires something we cannot provide. In Christ, he provides a Savior who bore our sin on the cross. This work of salvation is a grace gift which means it is not deserved or earned but freely given. Nothing we do can earn us salvation.*

God extends this grace gift to us, and it is through faith we receive it. The Greek word for faith is "pistis". The Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words lays out the main elements of faith in an invisible God as distinct from faith in humankind. The first element is a firm conviction, producing a full acknowledgement of God's revelation or truth. The second is a personal surrender to him based on that conviction. The final element of faith is a conduct or lifestyle inspired by such surrender.

When we receive God's saving grace through faith, we are surrendering or giving our lives to the truth that God loves us, will forgive our sin because we cannot do that without him, and welcomes us into a new relationship with him through Jesus Christ. We begin a lifelong process of being made more and more into the image of Jesus.

- Whether you have walked with Jesus for a short time or many years, what changes do you see in your life because of God working in your life?

Leaders: *Verse 10 says we are God's "handiwork". This thought comes from the Greek word "poiema" from which we get the English word "poem". Our new lives are the product or result of our faith in*

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Christ. He is making us into new people who are learning to walk or live in his kingdom. Paul says this new life is seen in the good works God has already planned for us to do.

The word “works” can cause confusion because Paul has just said in verses 8-10 that we are saved by grace and not by works. Now he is telling us that we are created to do good works. Someone may ask, “Which is it?”

*One commentator shed light on this by saying, “Works do not **win** salvation . . . but they do **express** salvation.” Another look at Romans 6:17-18 is helpful. We once lived as slaves to sin but now “you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.”*

Our hearts, the center of our will and understanding, have been changed. Our allegiance is now to Jesus, our Savior and Lord. “Good works” result from this change. They can be seen in what we do but also in how we relate to others in our lives. This is as much about who we are as what we do.

Because our lives are Jesus’ handiwork, what are some examples of “good deeds” that flow from for our lives? Responses can be related to us as individuals or as the community of faith called VRBC.

These examples may help spark other ideas from Scripture.

- *To make disciples of all nations and be ambassadors of reconciliation (Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21)*
- *To be storytellers of what Jesus has done in our lives (Psalms 96:1-4; Acts 1:8)*
- *To care for those who cannot care for themselves (Matthew 25:34-40)*
- *To pray for and encourage one another as we grow together in Christ (Ephesians 6:18; Hebrews 10:24)*

PRAY

- Begin this time by asking people to silently reflect on whether they walk in the way of the world or the way of the kingdom. Ask the Lord for hearts to be softened and responsive to the work of the Holy Spirit.
- As a group, use popcorn prayers to express praise and thanksgiving for all God has done for us through his great love, mercy, and grace.
- One way we do good work in the kingdom is to pray for those who have yet to know Jesus. Spend time praying for family members, friends, co-workers, or neighbors who still walk in the way of the world. Pray they would receive the grace gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.
- Another work of the kingdom is to encourage one another toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24). Pray for awareness in what those good deeds are and the commitment to follow through.

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