

The word "hope" is written in a lowercase, rounded font. Each letter is a different color: 'h' is red, 'o' is purple, 'p' is orange, and 'e' is light green. The word is centered within a red rectangular border with rounded corners. The background consists of several overlapping, wavy, organic shapes in shades of blue, teal, and purple, creating a layered, abstract effect.

hope

LEADER GUIDE

A special thanks to:

Tasha Burgoyne, Brian Daily, Linda Flatt, Laurie Hartman, Julie Meiners, and Barry Rodriguez for their work writing and crafting this guide.

Members of The Listening Table, for lending us their wisdom and insights.

Rick Taylor for his editorial expertise.

The Grace Church Communications team for their design and project management skills.

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Published by Grace Church, 5504 East 146th Street, Noblesville, IN 46062.
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WELCOME

As a Leader, How do I Navigate Conversations on Diversity?

The Hope Series has been designed to look at the Broken Place of Hatred by exploring four topics: The Path of Self-Giving Love, Unity in Diversity, A Merciful Community, and The Best of Both Worlds.

Following the weekend message, Life Group members will have the opportunity to individually engage with God through daily devotionals, then meet to wrestle together with these difficult matters.

We've all been a part of uncomfortable conversations, where harmless dialogue devolves into heated exchange. The result? Our words become weapons and our relationships are threatened.

Your group has grown close and safe with one another. You've learned the value of authenticity. Hope Month will continue to stretch that muscle. Moving toward the healing of The Broken Place of Hatred means bringing our varied ways of thinking out into the light. We need to hear each other. We need to share how we've come to the place of our perspective. The safe space you've already created, where your group members speak freely and wrestle with difficult issues without being cut off or shut down, will be a critical element in handling this topic well.

As a Leader, you'll need to prepare your group to really listen to each other. Listening well means no interrupting, correcting, shaming, or becoming defensive.

Keep in mind ...

- Those who have never had a friend of another race or worked alongside someone of another culture (which is very possible in rural Indiana!), rely on stereotypes they've been told throughout life.
- Those who have never experienced being ignored, belittled, or scrutinized daily due to the color of their skin, accent, or cultural/religious background, may find it difficult to have conversations about the subject.
- And those who have experienced racism may find it even harder to discuss The Broken Place of Hatred with people who have never experienced it.

So why go there? Why put the safety and depth of connection of our groups on the line for such a difficult, volatile topic?

- Unless stereotypes are brought into the light, they will remain the default for our biases.
- Unless people have safe spaces to discuss their experiences, they will remain isolated.
- Until we can talk honestly and openly and recognize, confess, and lament our bias, we will never have real relationships that break down the barriers of hate.

“When we know better we do better.” Maya Angelou

As we open our hearts to each other, we’ll take a step toward aligning our hearts and actions toward the purpose for which God created His church. To represent the values of His Kingdom to the world.

Leading this effort is a tall order, so we went to the experts in hopes of supporting you. We asked some members of The Listening Table how they would coach you to lead through potentially difficult discussions.

Here are a few of their thoughts ...

- *Assume whoever is sharing is doing the best they can with what they know.*
- *Find ways to build knowledge so change can occur. Honor the collective wisdom in the room and embrace the idea of evolutionary thinking. Remember, the goal is not to stay put, but find ways to become aware and move forward.*
- *Remember, Life Group leaders do not need to have the answers. The Listening Table works because we come to listen - ask questions - and listen.*
- *I feel confident that those who study this topic will find their hearts broken. When we realize the privileges we’ve been given and the injustice others have had placed upon them, how can we not cry out to God in lament? Psalm 46:10*
- *Leaders should expect defensiveness, even in themselves. The truth is, we all have inherent bias. By beginning with a humble and prayerful disposition, we can have a better chance of fighting off a defensive attitude.*

Hope and healing are possible when we create safe spaces for difficult conversations to take place.

Let’s watch what God will do as together we invite Him to shed light on the darkened places of our understanding.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

**RE-CONNECT AND IRON
OUT THE DETAILS**

LEADERSHIP TIPS

Make a Plan

Before you delve into Week One of the Hope Series, gather your small group to reconnect and iron out the details of your upcoming Life Group session.

Welcome New Group Members

There is a possibility you have added a few new people to your group. Begin this week helping everyone feel comfortable with the transition using the following practices:

- Involve new people in your conversations, and fill in the gaps when they are missing the context of a story, etc..
- If you notice cliques or frequent telling of inside jokes and shared memories of veteran group members, encourage them privately to be mindful of everyone.
- Use icebreakers to help briefly acquaint new and returning group members by uncovering pieces of their story.

Make Copies of Small Group Guidelines

Small Group Guidelines (pg. 11) have been specifically created to help you navigate passionate conversations which may arise from the content of Hope Month. Make copies for your group members to refer to as you discuss the guidelines these this week.

SETTLE IN

Since most of your group members probably already have a relationship, plenty of time can be allotted this week to socialize and catch up.

Choose an Icebreaker below or make up your own to get the conversation going.

- What do you know about your ancestry?
- What is your favorite, non-American meal?
- Are you more likely to avoid conflict or meet it head on?
- If you could spend a summer anywhere in the world, where would you go, and why?

DETAILS, DETAILS, DETAILS!

After you've allowed plenty of time to socialize, pull your group together to iron out the logistics.

p7

This will be a great opportunity to practice listening to one another as you work to come up with solutions that suit everyone.

What is the *schedule of the Series?

Week 1: Self-Giving Love April 27/28
Week 2: Unity in Diversity May 4/5

Week 3: Merciful Community May 11/ 12

Week 4: Best of Both Worlds May 18/19

*Daily devotions are to be completed each week following the weekend message.

In other words,

- Listen to weekend message
- Complete daily devotionals pertinent to message
- Discuss weekend message & daily devotionals in Life Group

How often will we meet?

Meeting weekly during the actual sermon series will build the most momentum and cohesion. But it may not be practical.

Some groups may go through the Participant Guide during the sermon series and discuss both in tandem. Others may wait until after the sermon series is complete and then review the series online as they work through the Participant Guide.

What day and what time will we meet?

Ask an administratively gifted group member to manage your group calendar and send out reminders or updates as needed.

Here is one possible template for groups that meet every other week.

Weekend Message	Daily Devotions	Life Group Meeting
April 27/28: Week 1: The Path of Self Giving Love	April 28 – May 4: Week 1 Devotions	Week of May 5: Discuss Week 1 Sermon and Devotions
May 4/5: Week 2: Unity in Diversity	May 6 – May 11: Week 2 Devotions	Week of May 19: Discuss Sermons and Devotions from Weeks 2 & 3
May 11/12: Week 3: A Merciful Community	May 13 – 18: Week 3 Devotions	
May 18/19: Week 4: The Best of Both Worlds	May 20 – May 25: Week 4 Devotions May 26 – June 1: Review the Series	Week of June 2: Discuss Week 4 Sermon & Devotions and Wrap up

Where will we meet?

Be sure your location has plenty of parking.

What about food?

Some groups are all about food, others would rather not make it a part of their meetings. Ask your group their preference.

If your group wants to make food a part of their gathering, talk about the possibilities.

You might choose to ...

- Take turns bringing snacks
- Have a monthly pitch-in
- Schedule a few special times during the coming session to make food a part of your gathering (e.g. following prayer or serve experience, to celebration the places God moved during this session)

Assign someone who enjoys hospitality to manage this for your group.

What about the kids?

If you're like most groups, deciding what to do with your children during the time your group meets can be a challenge. On the other hand, making them a part of your time together can be a great opportunity for them to be influenced and known by your community.

As your group works through the question of childcare, here are a few possibilities:

- Each parent arranges their own childcare.
- Children and a sitter are brought to group meetings.
- Children are included in part of the group time (perhaps for a meal), then sent to another part of the home with a sitter.
- If two homes are relatively close, the children can be at one home with a sitter and the adults can meet at the other home.

Get the conversation going with the questions below

- What's our general approach to handling childcare?
- How often will we involve the kids?
- At what age should parents no longer bring children with them to the group?
- If we're handling childcare as a group:
 - Where should the childcare be provided?
 - How will we handle the money?
- What training should the childcare providers have?
- What resources or schedule should the children have, if any?

Remember, what works right now won't necessarily work in the future. The situation will change as the kids grow. Be flexible and keep assessing your situation.

How will we handle prayer?

We encourage you to make prayer an intentional part of your group experience. Use the prayer guide at the end of each study to direct your group each week in prayer.

GETTING STARTED WITH THE HOPE SERIES

Show the group members how to access the Hope Series Curriculum through the Grace app on their smart phones or tablets. If you have members who desire and cannot get a paper copy for any reason, please let a member of the Life Group staff at your campus know and he or she will get copies to you. Familiarize your group with its format by looking over Week One. Point out the preamble on Philippians 2 by Tim Ayers and encourage your group members to read the passage on their own.

Create Small Group Guidelines*

*The guidelines suggested for the Hope Series are different than previously used in Life Groups. Take time to go over these with your group before you begin.

It is a good idea to take a fresh look at the hopes and expectations of the group each session. This regular exercise will help you thrive as well as circumvent any unhealthy dynamics that might threaten the group.

Pass out a copy of the Small Group Guidelines to everyone. Have a pen ready to record everything you hear.

SMALL GROUP GUIDELINES FOR THE HOPE SERIES

Difficult conversations are most effective when a Life Group agrees on ways to navigate them together.

Read the Guidelines below and ask your group members for input and consensus following each point.

We will be Curious Learners

We must all be willing to come to the table as curious learners. Albert Einstein said, “Any fool can know, the point is to understand.” He also said, “The more I learn, the more I realize I don’t know.” When we come together to talk about diversity, we must come as learners who are curious to understand someone else’s experience and perspective. We must understand that we will always be learners when it comes to one another, and specifically when it comes to this topic.

As someone with a different perspective shares, we will listen closely to understand the ways their experience, upbringing, values, and relationships have shaped their viewpoint.

Rather than becoming defensive or trying to be “right,” our heart is to understand each other, even though we disagree.

We will Assume the Best

We choose to believe that whoever is sharing is doing the best they can with what they know. They are not intentionally trying to hurt anyone with their perspective.

We will Avoid Interrupting and Ask Permission to Share

We will listen to listen, not listen to reply.

Rather than interrupting someone with a different view, we will allow them time to share, and then ask permission to offer our perspective. E.g. “I see it a little differently. Would it be okay with you if I try to explain why?”

We will Assume the Right Posture

We will work toward a balance of meekness and resolve. Meekness (strength under control) allows us to be graceful with others who disagree with us and careful when dealing with disputable matters of Scripture. Resolve is the courage to stand firm on any deeply held beliefs that we determine are from the heart of God and with love, speak the truth.

We will Handle Scripture with Care

When referring to Scripture in our discussion, we understand Christ followers may vary in their interpretation or application of a passage.

We will Pay Attention to our Words

Instead of declaring the truth ... *It is well-known that ... Everyone knows ... The statistics prove ...*

We will communicate our truth ... *I believe ... I have noticed ... To me, it feels like ...*

Instead of critiquing people.... *You are over-reacting ... You have your facts wrong ...*

We will respond to the position with grace.... *I'm wondering whether that position takes into account.....*

We will Look for the Imago Dei (God's Image) in one another

As we listen to each other's stories and experiences, we will look for God's image in both our differences and similarities. We will look for new ways to see and understand Him through one another. We will give and receive in conversation as if we believe that we belong to each other as necessary parts of God's image.

We will Make Safe Space

There are layers and years of history and hurt underneath each of our individual and collective experiences when it comes to this topic. We cannot ignore systemic racism and our country's history as we engage in this topic, but we can make safe space for each other.

Our conversations and our week-long study guide focus is just a brief exploration into The Broken Place of Hatred. For some, it will be a beginning point in understanding or considering something for the first time. It might nudge others further down the path of love. And some may be moved toward lament, sadness, or anger. We will make room for these varied responses and more, because no matter how difficult this topic is, we believe hope is possible.

*"Loving the heart of God will always call you toward uncomfortable love:
there isn't any other kind."
Alia Joy, Glorious Weakness*

WEEK ONE:

THE PATH OF SELF-GIVING LOVE

OVERVIEW

Our world is burdened by The Broken Place of Hatred. We see discrimination, racism, genocide, dehumanization, and segregation along so many different lines (gender, age, race, nationality, etc.). Most of the time when we try to fix these problems, however, we don't acknowledge the fact that these are outcomes of a much longer path of hatred which starts anytime we see ourselves as better than the *other* we are encountering. To heal The Broken Place of Hatred, we must walk an entirely different path: The Path of Self-Giving Love.

In Philippians 2:1-11, Paul pleads with the church in Philippi to “love one another” and “work together with one mind and purpose.” To do this, he suggests we must have “the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.” And how did Jesus live? He walked the path of self-giving love. Even though he had all power in the universe, he “gave up his divine privileges,” lowered himself in humility, and lifted broken humanity up through his self-sacrificial love on the cross. As Christ's church, we can show the world an alternative to the hatred we see around us. When we encounter *others*, we must follow our Savior down the humble path he chose to walk.

LEADERSHIP TIPS

Plan Ahead

Some of your group members will want to talk about their experience engaging with God during their daily devotions. Others will want to discuss the sermon. Some may bring additional resources they hope to share to enhance the topic. Because there is a greater amount of material available in this series than you'll be able to cover during your discussion, focus on themes, big ideas, and personal application of the material.

Monitor Sharing Time

The subject matter of this series will likely ignite passionate discussion, causing some to dominate the conversation. Make it a high priority to hear from everyone. Be aware of the amount of time everyone shares, and don't be afraid to interrupt someone who is oversharing to allow for the quieter person to talk.

GUIDE FOR DISCUSSION

SETTLE IN AND PRAY (20 MINUTES)

Use this time to allow your group to casually catch up with one another.

Leader or volunteer to open your discussion in prayer.

ENGAGING IN WEEK ONE (50 MINUTES)

Choose questions from the list below or select from the list of all RESPOND questions from Week One Devotions on pg 16.

1. What impacted you most in the weekend message, The Path of Self-Giving Love?
2. Describe a time when you felt ignored, belittled or less than.
3. What names, faces, or groups come to mind when you hear the word *other*?
4. What about when you hear the word “enemy”?
5. How can pride or fear limit your vision?

MAKING IT PERSONAL (20 MINUTES)

6. Has your desire to prove you were right ever resulted in unloving behavior? What happened?
7. Describe a time when Jesus interrupted your plans and adjusted your vision.

PRAY (20 MINUTES)

Some groups prefer to break into groups occasionally by gender. Determine to do this as you feel led.

- Ask everyone: What do you need prayer for as you consider the Path of Self-Giving Love?
- Pray for one another.
- Invite someone to read the Prayer of St. Francis (pg 27 of Hope Participant Guide) to close your time together.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love.

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand;

to be loved, as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

WEEK ONE RESPOND QUESTIONS

- What stood out or surprised you about God's love in today's Bible passages?
- Describe a time when you felt ignored, belittled or less than.
- What names, faces, or groups come to mind when you hear the word other? What about when you hear the word "enemy"?
- The first step on the path to love is humility. As you go through this week, pay attention and take advantage of the opportunities God provides for you to assume a position of humility. Record what happens so you can share your experience with your Life Group.
- What do you think it means to love your neighbor as yourself? What is implied in this command?
- What "head knowledge" have you gained that has yet to be applied in your actions?
- Sympathy is feeling sorry for someone while empathy involves putting yourself in the place of another and identifying with their feelings. In what ways do you distance yourself in order to avoid seeing or feeling empathy for others?
- What can we learn from the way Jesus responded to this religious expert? How might his example guide our conversations with people with whom we disagree?
- Empathy motivates us to set aside our privilege when we are not directly affected and to show compassion. Make a list of current issues that impact people who are different than you.
- In what ways have you been able to learn more about the needs of others? Reading a book?* Watching a movie? Volunteering? Inviting someone to coffee to get to know their story? Share your experiences with your group. Together, brainstorm ideas on how you can move toward others with whom you might not otherwise engage.
- How can pride or fear limit your vision?
- Has your desire to prove you were right ever resulted in unloving behavior? What happened?
- Describe a time when Jesus interrupted your plans and adjusted your vision.

WEEK TWO

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

OVERVIEW

When discussing issues like segregation, racism, and discrimination, many Christians believe that, since they are not actively harming those of other ethnicities, they have no further work to do in healing The Broken Place of Hatred. However, this is not the same as walking the path of self-giving love. To have the same attitude as Christ, we must all be willing to humble ourselves and use our strengths and power to elevate each other's gifts.

In Ephesians 4:1-16, Paul describes Christ-followers as members of one body and pleads with us to “bind ourselves together in love.” Within that, however, he acknowledges a diversity of strengths and gifts given to different members of the body. These gifts help us to “build up the church” and strengthen it against the attacks of immaturity and false teaching.

But how can we be strengthened if we remain segregated along ethnic lines? How can the body of Christ stand strong when each part of the body operates independently? Our call is to open wide the doors of our community, to welcome in those of other ethnicities, and mutually serve one another in self-giving love, selflessly lifting up one another's gifts. When we do this, using our strength and power to elevate others, we can finally be the strong, healthy body God has always desired for us to become.

LEADERSHIP TIPS

The book, *Beyond Colorblind* by Sarah Shin, offers a fresh perspective on issues of diversity. Send an email to your group members before you meet this week, encouraging them to visit the website below and watch a few short videos to expand their understanding. (If time is limited, watching the Introduction Video will capture the sentiment of the website.)

<https://beyondcolorblind.com/companion-videos/>

GUIDE FOR DISCUSSION

SETTLE IN AND PRAY (20 MINUTES)

Use this time to allow your group to casually catch up with one another.

Leader or volunteer to open your discussion in prayer.

ENGAGING IN WEEK TWO (50 MINUTES)

Choose questions from the list below or select from the list of all RESPOND questions from Week Two Devotions on pg 20.

1. What impacted you most in the message, Unity in Diversity?
2. What groups of people or neighborhoods do you avoid and why?
3. Where have you seen the Church reflect the diverse community Jesus modeled and desires for us?
4. Describe a time you felt stretched beyond your comfort zone. What was your physiological response? Did you feel like fighting, freezing, or fleeing?

MAKING IT PERSONAL (20 MINUTES)

5. What did you learn about yourself and others from watching the introductory Colorblind video? (If anyone watched additional videos, invite them to share their response.)
6. Describe the last time you sat at the table with someone who is different than you?

PRAY (20 MINUTES)

Ask someone in your group to read Ephesians 4:1-4.

Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. Ephesians 4: 1-4.

Divide into pairs and share the word or phrase from the passage that you wish were more evident in your life. Pray for each other.

WEEK TWO RESPOND QUESTIONS

- How do you think Jesus' vulnerability and humility impacted the way the woman responded to Him?
- What groups of people or neighborhoods do you avoid and why?
- Who do you find yourself relating to most in this passage?
- How do you think this woman's ethnicity impacted the way she responded to Jesus?
- Look at the list of recommended resources at the end of this chapter. Pick a book to read. Start reading it with the intention to listen, learn and approach the words on the page thirsty – humbly asking for a drink that brings a new perspective. Pray the following liturgical prayer from Every Moment Holy by Doug McKelvey before you begin:
- How did Jesus give this woman a voice?
- Where have you seen the Church reflect the diverse community Jesus modeled and desires for us?
- What do you think the disciples were thinking and feeling as they ate and slept in Samaritan homes?
- God used visions with Cornelius and Peter, but he also orchestrated a face-to-face meeting between the two men. What can we learn from spending time with people who have different backgrounds and ethnicities?
- When was the last time you sat at the table with someone who is different than you?
- It's likely that Cornelius was only stationed in Caesarea for a period of time and would eventually head back to Rome. How do you think his conversion and surrender to Jesus impacted the growth of the Church in the West? How do you think it impacts us today? What if Peter had refused to let the Holy Spirit move him beyond his personal biases and comfort?
- Head over to <https://beyondcolorblind.com/companion-videos/> and watch at least one video from this series. Talk with your Life Group about what you learn about yourself and others.
- Describe a time you felt stretched beyond your comfort zone. What was your physiological response? Did you feel like fighting, freezing or fleeing?
- Where are you when it comes to turning around towards The Path of Love, lamenting the brokenness as an individual or community, or allowing your thinking to be stretched and changed?
- Take a look at your social media feeds, your favorite news channels, the authors you read, etc. What voices are you paying attention to? Do they all look alike? Do they all look like you? Pay attention to what's shaping the way you see the world. Find one new voice to follow, read or pay attention to who brings a new perspective.
- Attend a local Listening Table event. The Listening Table describes themselves as "a task force building a longer table full of diverse people and stories, with an open invitation for all to sit down and listen and share along with us. We know we don't have all the answers, or even all the questions, so we're open-handedly and attentively learning from voices of the marginalized. Specifically, we're a group working to combat racism and white supremacy in Hamilton County, IN and Indianapolis through education, prayer, and action." Find out more here: <https://www.facebook.com/ListeningTable/>

WEEK THREE

A MERCIFUL COMMUNITY

OVERVIEW

We live in a time of growing income inequality. Because of the allure of wealth, we run the risk of giving in to economic classism, just like the early Church – favoring one group over another and isolating ourselves from each other. However, the path of self-giving love requires us to approach people’s wealth or poverty with an entirely different lens.

In James 2:1-13, the Apostle James pleads with the Church not to show favoritism to those with significant economic wealth. By elevating one group of people over another like this, we miss the reality that God has gifted each Christ-follower in unique ways. Instead, we must walk the path of self-giving love and “show mercy to others.” We must each use our strengths and powers to lift one another up and make ours a community in which we see in each other not economic class, but the very image of God.

LEADERSHIP TIPS

Be aware that some may see poverty as the result of a lack of effort or initiative. They do not appreciate the role that unearned advantages may play in someone’s ability to gain a sustainable income. If group members try to turn the conversation toward “deserving poor” versus the “undeserving poor,” challenge them to consider that, by categorizing someone’s poverty, they are leaning toward judgment rather than love.

Some may take the leap that caring for the poor means donating more to individuals or charities. While that may be a reasonable next step for some, try to keep the focus of your conversation on the condition of the heart.

GUIDE FOR DISCUSSION

SETTLE IN AND PRAY (20 MINUTES)

Choose questions from the list below or select from the list of all RESPOND questions from Week Two Devotions on pg 24.

ENGAGING IN WEEK THREE (50 MINUTES)

1. What impacted you most in the message, A Merciful Community?
2. What impacted you as you considered the definition of God's family in today's Bible passages?
3. Who are YOU in the parable of the great banquet?
 - The first guests, who find excuses why now just isn't a good time to step fully into fellowship with God?
 - The second guests, dragged in from unlikely places, who can't imagine being invited by the King of Kings into his banquet?
 - The host, looking high and low for anyone who might join you in fellowship and faith?
4. Do you subconsciously offer greater respect to those who most display signs of ambition or hard work?

MAKING IT PERSONAL (20 MINUTES)

5. Is there someone in your life you've previously criticized for their lack of ambition or stagnant position? How might you extend them grace?
6. We all have something in our lives that we hold onto more tightly than Jesus. Examine your life. What is holding you back from serving Jesus completely? How might you begin to release it?

PRAY (20 MINUTES)

Invite each group member to offer a word or phrase to God in prayer articulating the kind of community they long for the church to be.

Pray for God to make your group a merciful community.

WEEK THREE RESPOND QUESTIONS

- What impacted you as you considered the definition of God's family in today's Bible passages?
- Who in your life have you seen as *other* due to your economic differences? How have these differences impacted the depth of your relationship?
- Who are YOU in the parable of the great banquet?
 - The first guests, who find excuses why now just isn't a good time to step fully into fellowship with God?
 - The second guests, dragged in from unlikely places, who can't imagine being invited by the King of Kings into his banquet?
 - The host, looking high and low for anyone who might join you in fellowship and faith?
- Describe a time when you took the time to get to know someone who is different than you.
- Have you ever received an anonymous gift?
- Have you ever given a gift to someone secretly? What was the result?
- Do you subconsciously offer greater respect to those who most display signs of ambition or hard work?
- Is there someone in your life you've previously criticized for their lack of ambition or stagnant position? How might you extend them grace?
- We all have something in our lives that we hold onto more tightly than Jesus. Examine your life. What is holding you back from serving Jesus completely? How might you begin to release it?
- In what ways might your economic level make you feel entitled? Less than?

WEEK FOUR

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

OVERVIEW

Our world is rapidly globalizing. Radically different human cultures are encountering one another to an unprecedented degree. Different nationalities within the global Church are interacting in ways we could have never predicted even a few decades ago – especially here at Grace! However, fear of the unknown and our human tendency to segregate ourselves away from the *other* has led to divisions along cultural lines. The problem, as we've seen throughout this series, is that a culturally divided Church misses out on the tremendous gifts, beauty, and mutual strengthening that God intended for us to enjoy.

In Isaiah 60, the prophet paints a beautiful future picture of nations from around the world coming to Jerusalem to worship God. As they come, they are bringing with them the wealth, splendor, art, and resources of their nations to adorn the temple. The image, echoed in Revelation 21:22-26, is not one of homogeneity and a loss of cultural distinction, but the elevation of human cultures for the sake of fully glorifying God in worship.

When we encounter other cultures here at Grace, we must use this image as an encouragement to walk the path of self-giving love. Rather than expecting those from other cultures to assimilate to our way of worship, we should seek to elevate their unique gifts and strengths, allowing them to influence our community.

LEADERSHIP TIPS

Be intentional to end this series well with your group.

Think through the common themes. Remember the times when people have been personally challenged. Talk about places where group members plan to individually apply what they've learned.

Draw out common themes where they have been personally challenged.

- Brainstorm together ways your group might put this study into action.
 - Invite your group to be a change-agent during weekend services by intentionally greeting and welcoming others and inviting them to sit with you.
 - Consider serving at the Care Center where you will rub shoulders with people from different countries and walks of life.
 - Consider serving in one of our partner ministries.
 - Consider going on a short-term mission trip.
- Celebrate together, (possibly with a pitch-in meal), to mark the places God has stretched the group.

GUIDE FOR DISCUSSION

SETTLE IN AND PRAY (20 MINUTES)

Choose questions from the list below or select from the list of all RESPOND questions from Week Two Devotions on pg 28.

ENGAGING IN WEEK FOUR (50 MINUTES)

1. What impacted you most in the message, The Best of Both Worlds?
2. The Spirit of God is not bound by physical and geographical boundaries, yet He gives us power right where we are so that the Gospel of Jesus will be spread. How have you seen the Holy Spirit move despite boundaries, whether physical, emotional, or cultural?
3. Engaging different cultures can be intimidating because there are so many unknowns. What are some things that keep you from spending time with people of different backgrounds?

MAKING IT PERSONAL (20 MINUTES)

4. Think about the relationships within your community. Are they characterized by unity? Why or why not?
5. How have you pursued reconciliation in the past? Which of your relationships still need reconciliation?
6. Brainstorm together ways your group might put this study into action.
 - Invite your group to be a change-agent during weekend services by intentionally greeting and welcoming others and inviting them to sit with you.
 - Consider serving at the Care Center or with one of the local partner ministries. (Remember that serving is one of the rhythms of a Life Group.)

PRAY (20 MINUTES)

Pray for these truths from this week to permeate our lives. Pray for our group to make it personal. Pray that we experience the filling of the Spirit of the Lord, which brings...

- Belonging
- Diversity
- Power
- Unity
- Reconciliation

Going around the circle, ask each group member to share which of the five characteristics they most need with regard to the topic of Diversity. Then have the person on their right pray for that request. Continue until all have been prayed for.

End your time together with Communion, thanking God for what He did for us to break down the walls of hostility making it possible for us to move into this broken place.

WEEK FOUR RESPOND QUESTIONS

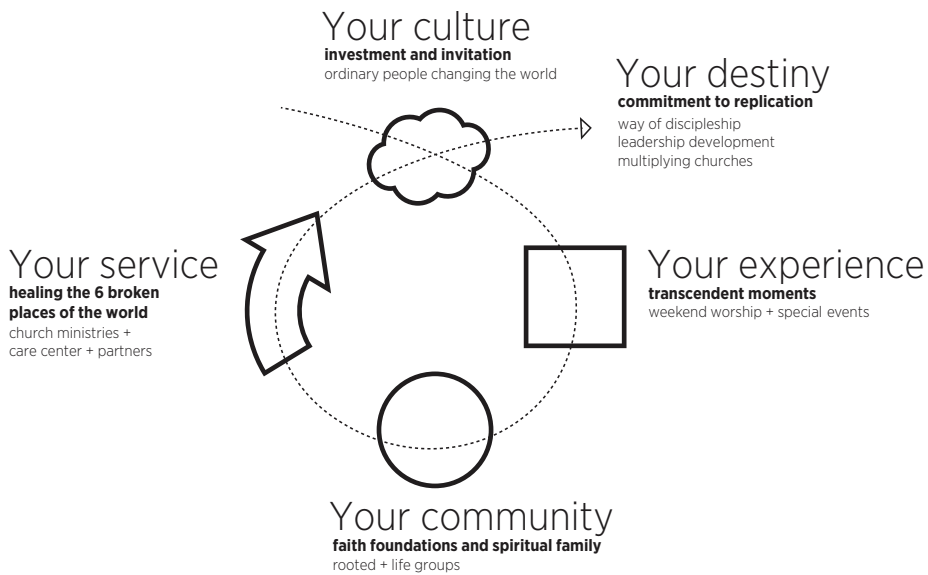
- No one could have expected what God would do through his Spirit after Jesus ascended to heaven. Make a list of the ways the Holy Spirit impacted the believers in Jerusalem.
- The Spirit of God is not bound by physical and geographical boundaries, yet He gives us power right where we are so that the Gospel of Jesus will be spread. How have you seen the Holy Spirit move despite boundaries, whether physical, emotional, or cultural?
- Engaging different cultures can be intimidating because there are so many unknowns. What are some things that keep you from spending time with people of different backgrounds?
- The word “power” can evoke intense emotions. What are some images that come to mind when you think of power?
- Describe the power of the world versus the power of the Spirit.
- In what areas of your life do you need the Holy Spirit to give you supernatural power?
- Choose one barrier you see present in your community and write it down. Record a prayer below, asking the Holy Spirit to empower you to bring change in hard places.
- List all the ways the Holy Spirit impacted interpersonal relationships in Acts 2:42-47.
 - Choose one evidence of the Spirit from the list you made above. Which of these is God calling you to do for the sake of unity?
- Think about the relationships within your community. Are they characterized by unity? Why or why not?
- Get quiet and take an assessment of your heart. Does your Christian unity go beyond theological agreement? Ask God to show you where you need to pursue radical unity.
- Do you resonate more with the early Jewish Christians or with the Gentile believers? Why?
- How have you pursued reconciliation in the past? Which of your relationships still need reconciliation?
- The Gospel of Jesus is for everyone: Jews and Gentiles, men and women, U.S. Citizens and immigrants and refugees, Democrats and Republicans. That’s good news! Which demographic would be difficult for you to accept as a fellow Christian?

APPENDIX

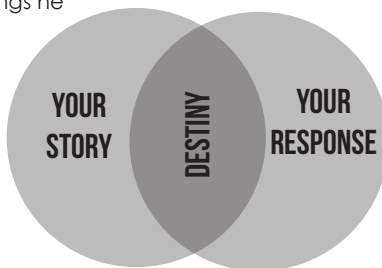
THE LOOP

At Grace Church, we believe every person was born with a God-given destiny: to be used by God to heal this broken world. Finding your destiny begins with following Jesus. This happens when you're invited from culture to experience transcendent experiences with God, find deep spiritual family, serve in tangible ways and, ultimately, multiply yourself by inviting others along the journey. The Loop is our strategy for helping you do that. With concrete next steps and church-wide integration, the Loop is Grace's approach to help you discover that **you were made for more.**

Life Groups are a continuation of the community that began in Rooted. Though diverse in many ways, group members are united in their desire to understand the depth of God's love, their identity in Him, and the purpose for which they've been created. The spiritual family found in a Life Group offers support along this journey.



We are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago...
Ephesians 2:10



...For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.
Romans 8:22

THE 7 RHYTHMS OF COMMUNITY

During the Rooted experience you were introduced to 7 rhythms that when practiced in community, can significantly impact both personal and Kingdom growth. These rhythms have been incorporated into the Life Groups' curriculum and are meant to become lifetime habits.

ONE: GOD'S WORD

- Daily Devotion: Routinely read the Word to deepen your understanding of God and His direction for your life

TWO: PRAYER

- Personal prayer that develops into an ongoing conversation with God
- Prayer with Life Group
- Prayer Experience during every Life Group season

THREE: SERVE THE COMMUNITY

- Continue to discover the talents, gifts and passions that God has given you and consider how you might express them
- Participate in a Serve Experience with Life Group members
- Regularly serve in a ministry of Grace Church or one of our partner ministries

FOUR: FREEDOM FROM STRONGHOLDS

- Continue taking steps towards freedom and healing from your stronghold
- Give and receive encouragement from Life Group members as all strive to grow in freedom

FIVE: SACRIFICIAL GENEROSITY

- Give as God leads you, maintaining a palms-up posture
- Continue the discussion of your journey towards generosity with your Life Group

SIX: SHARE YOUR STORY

- Look for the story God is writing in your life
- Share your story with people in your sphere of influence as prompted by the Holy Spirit

SEVEN: CELEBRATION

- Celebrate with your Life Group, church, and family how God is working in your life
- Attend weekend services regularly to worship and celebrate with other followers of Jesus

LEADER SKILLS

A Life Group Leader assumes the role of a shepherd, guiding the group through each season's discovery experience. It is not your responsibility to teach. Much growth happens through the personal devotions and small group experiences. As you facilitate open discussions and care for the needs of both the individual and the entire group, you will provide a safe space for connection and growth.

CONNECTION AMONG GROUP MEMBERS

To foster a healthy, safe, growing community, it is your responsibility to help your group members connect.

- Encourage group dialogue. Your discussion shouldn't be a back and forth question and answer session between the Leader and a group member. It is meant to be a conversation among the entire group. Encourage everyone to ask questions and respond to one another.
- Ask for "popcorn" answers. One way to begin a good conversation is to ask all group members to respond with a one or two-word "popcorn" answer. (e.g., In one word, how did you feel after the prayer experience?)
- Use Icebreakers. During the first few weeks, begin your discussion with an icebreaker. This will help everyone transition from their day to being fully present with the group.

Possible Icebreakers:

- What would be your dream job? Why?
- Are you more of a dog person or a cat person? Why?
- What's your favorite season of the year?
- What was your favorite subject in school? Why?
- As a kid, what did you want to grow up to be?
- What was your biggest flop in the kitchen?
- What is the best or worst gift you ever received?

ASK GOOD QUESTIONS

In addition to the questions provided in this guide, asking secondary questions will greatly enhance your discussion and draw out deeper conversation.

Open Ended Questions

Open-ended questions invite group members to think critically, consider their feelings, and answer in multiple ways. They often begin with the words, who, what, where, when, and how. Avoid multiple-choice questions and those that elicit a yes/no response. Open-ended questions will allow for those in your group to share deeper thoughts, feelings, and ideas about the topic.

Here are some examples:

- Which of the points we just discussed most applies to you?
- What do you think about that?
- How does this section affect you?
- What are you noticing about what you are learning?
- Which of these points do you most need to work on?
- Who has a different perspective?

Follow-up Questions

Many people will default to providing short and simple answers unless encouraged to share more details. When a group member offers a vague response, ask additional questions.

Examples:

- What makes you say that?
- How do you feel about that?
- What experiences may have led you to draw that conclusion?
- How do you think that would have affected you if you had been living in the time of Jesus?
- How would you explain your answer to someone who isn't a Christ-follower?

Questions For Quiet Group Members

If a group member is hesitant to share, try broadening your first question. Begin by asking something like, *Did you enjoy the chapter?* As they respond, narrow your questions. e.g., *What was one part you particularly enjoyed?*

Questions That Encourage Life Application

Participation in a Life Group is meant to foster personal growth and transformation. Help group members apply what they are learning by asking application questions.

Examples:

- What is one step you can take this week to work toward praying more consistently?
- Who might need you to be a Good Samaritan to them in your own life, right now?

LISTEN WELL

Listening is a critical skill for all leaders. When your group members recognize that you're listening to them, they will feel a deeper sense of belonging in your group. The art of active listening can be implemented by using some of the following strategies:

Provide Your Undivided Attention

- Avoid being distracted by side conversations, pencil tapping, cell phones, etc.
- Resist preparing a response while the speaker is still talking
- Pay attention to the speaker's body language

Show That You're Listening

- Maintain eye contact
- Lean in towards the person speaking
- Be aware of your facial expressions (smile occasionally!)
- Nod when appropriate
- Make sure your posture is inviting (e.g., don't cross your arms)

Provide Feedback

- Reflect
What I'm hearing is ... Sounds like you are saying ... Sounds like you are feeling...
- Clarify
What do you mean when you say ...?
- Follow up
You mentioned that you don't enjoy crowds... why is that?

WHEN THINGS DON'T GO SMOOTHLY

Occasionally, you'll encounter a difficult scenario in your group. Be aware of possible challenges and be prepared to navigate them should they arise.

Hard Questions

Your group members may ask questions you don't know how to answer. When this happens, remember:

- Saying I don't know is okay. People will respect your honesty. Follow with, I'll do my best to find the answer before we meet again.
- Don't give an answer if you don't know it, especially when it comes to the Bible. When you don't know the answer to a tough question, research it yourself. This process will develop you as a Leader. If you are struggling, consult someone who might know. Once you find the answer, make sure you discuss it in the group so everyone can grow from the exercise.
- Leaders can make the honest mistake of giving a wrong answer. If this happens, be humble and admit your error.
- Sometimes there is not a right answer to a question. Do not feel a need to bring certainty in areas that are ambiguous.

Responding in Awkward Moments

When a group member shares something shocking, sad, or otherwise unexpected, the worst response is no response at all. Be sure to acknowledge the person, and consider responding with some of the following phrases:

- Thank you for your vulnerability in sharing that with the group.
- Thank you for trusting us with your story.
- I am so sorry that happened.
- I can hear in your voice that this has been difficult for you.
- I can see how important this is to you.

If appropriate, follow your comment with, *Can we pray for you?* Prayer will show the person that they have been heard while offering a helpful transition back to your discussion.

DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

Every small group will encounter occasional disruptive behaviors.

Examples include:

- The constant talker who monopolizes the discussion.
- The shy person who will not engage.
- Someone who repeatedly skips down rabbit trails and takes the whole group on the journey.
- The person who seems to be a bit needy—they need more prayer, more encouragement, more of you.

Prayerfully consider the severity of the disruption and appropriate action. Does the behavior need immediate attention? Is it a one-time occurrence or a continual disruption? Should it be addressed in group or outside the group? Is the behavior interfering with healthy group discussions?

Caring for the individual while protecting the health of a group is a tension to be managed. When the disruptive behavior seems to be negatively impacting the group, it is time to act.

The Constant Talker

- Sit next to the talker. Because this reduces your eye contact with them, they won't think you are asking them to answer anytime you look at them.
- Physically turn away from the talker to reduce their tendency to think you want them to respond.
- Interrupt if necessary. Your group members may be wishing you would!
- Direct questions to other people by name.
- Affirm their appropriate sharing.
- If the problem persists, talk privately with them. Affirm the energy they bring to the group. Then ask them to help involve the quieter group members by reducing the amount of time they share.
- Remember, if you have two hours together and fifteen group members, if equally distributed, each person only has eight minutes to share!

The Quiet Group Member Who Rarely Shares

- Position them across from you. As you make eye contact, they will feel more involved in the conversation.
- Direct easy questions to them.
- Express public and private appreciation as they share.
- Check in with the quiet group member. If they are unwilling to contribute, honor their perceived need.

The Fixer or Advice Giver

- Set the expectation early that advice will not be offered in the group unless requested.
- Consider making this part of your Life Group Guidelines.
- If you anticipate that a certain question may prompt more advice, give the directive ahead of time: I suspect that some of us may feel the urge to offer advice during this section. Remember our agreement to refrain from giving advice—no matter how tempting it might be.

The Person in Crisis

- Direct them to the Care Pathway (see pg. 92 of this guide).
- Check in with them during the week to let them know that you care and are praying for them.
- Help them to see your group as a place they can find community and encouragement. Gently guide them toward learning to participate without constantly inserting their crisis or overtaking the purpose of the group.

The Rabbit Trail Wanderer

- Be flexible—maybe the issue needs to be discussed even if it is not relevant to the weekly lesson.
- If diverting the conversation becomes a habit for someone, don't be afraid to interrupt and direct the group back on topic.
- Agree to discuss the off-topic issue with them later.

CARE PATHWAY

STEPS, RESOURCES AND TOOLS TO CARE FOR OTHERS WELL

Caring for others provides us with a unique discipleship opportunity. When people face a life storm, they are often more open to fresh ideas, suggestions and new ways of thinking to help navigate their life challenge.

- Our optimal goal when caring for others is to discern how we can best walk along side and support them in a loving manner while simultaneously encouraging them to engage their challenging journey wholeheartedly to promote life-change. More specifically, our hope is that their difficult journey draws them nearer to God, builds their compassion and empathy towards others, and solidifies a posture of humility that reminds us all that we need a Savior because of the reality of our brokenness.
- Ultimately, caring for others is a very special and powerful form of discipleship that should encourage and empower. Therefore, be cautious not to rob some one of a transformational experience by fixing it out of a desire to soothe your own discomfort as you bear witness to another's pain. Rather, support and guide them to resources that will encourage them towards healing and growth.

PRACTICAL TOOLS TO ENCOURAGE AND EMPOWER

- Your initial goal when you connect with someone who is hurting is to provide the ministry of “presence.” This means making time for someone, lending a listening ear, a word of encouragement, and a heartfelt prayer.
- It is equally important to understand your limits regarding your ability to help the person depending on their specific need. When you venture outside your capability and responsibility, helping can unfortunately turn into hurting.

CARE PATHWAY

If a person's needs go beyond what the ministry of presence can provide, invite them into one of three Care Pathways to engage in additional strategic support.

- Our **Care Center** can assist with physical/ practical needs through our choice food pantry, ESL services, Job Board, referral services and vehicle services.
- **Prayer Ministry** can provide additional spiritual support through Hope Rooms, prayer gatherings, after service prayer and submitting prayer requests.
- **Care Appointments** can provide support and resources regarding mental/ emotional and relational needs through counseling referrals, coaching, support/ recovery group info and general resource recommendations. Care appointments can be made online or by calling Grace Church.

EMERGENCIES

If you find yourself in a more serious situation in which a referral to a Care Pathway is not enough, for example, someone shares suicidal thoughts, please assist them with getting to a safe environment. This would include connecting them with family members or friends who can help them with next steps or your local emergency room. If you cannot find someone to transport the person to a safe environment, call and make arrangements with the police for transportation. If you are even wondering whether the situation is urgent, do not hesitate to call 911. We don't want to “guess” whether someone is serious about harming themselves or others.



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