



the core

the **central truths** of the faith

Discussion Guide

Your life has a purpose: Ephesians 2.10

Getting Started: 10 minutes

- o React to the following statement: "A life without purpose and meaning is not a life worth living."
- o Optional: What from the sermon, if anything, encouraged, challenged, or really made you think?

Setting the Stage: *Purpose. Meaning. Life without them is almost not worth living, but where do we find them? Are purpose and meaning something we generate within ourselves, or are they something external to us, defining aspects of life that are placed upon us by others, by powers and institutions much larger than ourselves? Deep down we inherently know that life is wrapped up in purpose and meaning but where do we find them and what do we do when our own conflicts with that of others? Is there a way to discover true purpose and meaning?*

Diving Into the Text: 60 minutes (The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Read Ephesians 2.1-10. (*Leader Note:* Today's approach to Scripture is a bit different, focusing more on allowing God to use our "right brain" to speak to us. This may be a stretch for some of your members who are used to the logical and systematic approach to Scripture prominent in our Western context. Explain that today's study is a bit different and allow time at the end to reflect on the experience.)
- Use the Context and Notes sections to unpack the basic themes and truths found in the text. (*Leader Note:* It is probably best to have one person do this, whether you as the leader or a person in your group. This should take no more than 10 minutes.)
- Read Ephesians 2.1-10 slowly and deliberately. (Group members should be still and seek to "hear" the text without comment or exegesis. Allow a few moments to have the words soak from the head to the heart.)
- Read Ephesians 2.1-10 slowly and deliberately. (Group members should seek to "see" the events in the text unfolding, much like a fly on the wall. Allow silence to have the images become real for members.)
- Read Ephesians 2.1-10 slowly and deliberately. (Group members should allow God to "place" them in the events of the text. Where God places them is His special word for them. Give 5-7 minutes of silence for members to talk with God. What is He trying to say to them? What is He affirming, asking, speaking?)
- Read Ephesians 2.1-10 slowly and deliberately. (Ask group members to share their experience. Where did God place them? What did He say to them? What are the practical implications for their lives?)

Wrapping Up: 20 minutes

- o Prayer requests
- o Group prayer time
- o House-keeping matters (assignments for the next meeting)

Group Notes

Your life has a purpose: Ephesians 2.1-10

Context and Background

Ephesians: The book of Ephesians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the house church in Ephesus in the first century. Most likely, this letter was an encyclical letter. That is, Paul intended this letter to be shared among the churches in Asia Minor. The strongest argument supporting this idea is the absence of addressed controversy or conflict in the letter. Most of Paul's letters are situational. They address specific questions and issues within a local context. However, in Ephesians, such questions and issues are missing. Rather, Paul seems to be outlining the general parameters of God's gracious movement to redeem people and unite Jews and Gentiles into a single people, along with the practical implications that this redeeming movement has for daily life. As such, the letter of Ephesians is Paul's most general and 'theological' letter. Some have argued that Paul intended the letter to be used as something of an introduction to the Gospel for churches loosely connected with his Ephesian mission, churches founded by missionaries associated with Paul, but not by Paul himself. Thus, the letter would serve as basic grounding for these churches, setting the parameters for faith and practice in these congregations, much like modern church manuals or articles of faith do for congregations today.

God's workmanship: Paul's description of the redemptive movement of bringing people from a state of sinfulness and separation to connection with God (Ephesians 2.1-10) concludes with a statement that reminds readers that such actions are God's alone. Paul states that those who have experienced salvation are "His workmanship." The emphasis in the language of the New Testament is upon the pronoun "His." The noun "workmanship" is basically a word that refers to the handiwork of a craftsman. In classical times this word was used to identify the skilful work of items such as a crown or a work of art. In the Old Testament, this word is used most often to refer to the work or deeds of people, but it could also be used to refer to the works of God (Psalm 64.9; 143.5). In the New Testament, the word is only used twice (Romans 1.20 and Ephesians 2.10). In Romans, the term is used to refer to God's creation as in Psalm 143.5. However, in Ephesians 2.10, the term is used to refer to a spiritual rather than physical creation. However, Paul combines the term with the verb "create" which is used to refer to God's physical creative act. Thus, Paul makes the claim that the act of salvation is actually nothing less than part of God's creative activity, the same creative activity that brought the world into existence. God is still creating, this time re-creating, bringing His former creation—people—back to His original intentions.

The Text

A life apart (Ephesians 2.1-3): Paul begins with a clear statement of life apart from God. This statement is certainly meant for his immediate audience but is an apt description of humanity in general. Life apart from God is one that can be likened to a living death. One may be physically animated, but they are completely separated—dead—to the life God originally intended for them. The connection, freedom, and purpose intended by God (Gen. 1-2, esp. Gen. 1.27-28) has been abrogated and something far worse has taken their place. Rather than connection with God, people now live under the power of the ruler of the air, a reference to Satan. Rather than freedom, people are in bondage to their own desires and thoughts. Rather than purpose, people find their lives marked by wrath; that is, their life is subject to forces other than God's blessing. The abrogation of life as God intended it has come through trespasses and sins. In the most general sense, sin is a rejection of God's life rather than simply the "bad things" we do. That is, people have intentionally chosen a life other than that which God intended.

A gracious rescue (Ephesians 2.4-7): The trajectory of humanity as one in bondage, missing the intentions and purposes of God is turned with the simple phrase "but God." Life would have continued but for God. God is rich in mercy and because of His mercy He has interrupted the life of people to bring a new life. This interruption has come through the person of Jesus, through whom God both makes people alive and restores connection with Himself. The verbs in the text are interesting as they speak of an action that has ongoing implications and outworkings. God has "saved" and the results of this salvation are still unfolding. In the present—not in the future—one may experience resurrection and intimacy with God in the heavenly realms. Paul's language reflects that he views salvation as a present rather than future experience, though certainly he understands the reality of future implications. Paul's point seems to be that one can now experience life with God rather than having to wait. God has moved to reverse the present standing of people, and such a movement is a work of grace. Grace in the context is more than an undeserved act motivated by mercy, but is rather the power of God given freely to people in an ongoing way to accomplish in them what they could not otherwise do for themselves.

A recreated life (Ephesians 2.8-10): God has freely shared His power with people to accomplish what they could not. The result is that people have access to life as God meant it to be. God's movement is something people can do nothing to earn. It is without merit. The effect being that boasting is removed, thus the temptation to turn away from God to self is once and for all removed. The end result is that people find themselves recreated, likened unto life in Eden (See *God's workmanship*). Life has been restored and with it freedom, connection, and purpose have been restored (Gen. 1.27-28). In this renewed state of life, one finds that they are once more co-laborers with God, having good tasks within creation to do keeping with God's purposes.

Application: Life apart from God is life, but not as it was meant to be. It is marked by an absence of true connection, freedom, and purpose as God intended. However, God is forever creating, now engaging in the process of re-creation, of remaking people so that they might experience life as He intended it. People do nothing to deserve such a work in their life. It is something completely of God. However, in experiencing God's re-creating movement people find a return to freedom, connection, and most importantly purpose. People find they are able to participate in God's larger purposes both for their life and for God's creation.