

DISCUSS

Brandon brings rivalries to the foreground as he introduces division in relationships.

Have you ever experienced rivalry in a way that has damaged a relationship?

Does belonging to a particular group and developing "pride in our tribe" tend to leave out others and, in turn, create toxic polarization?

GOD CREATED US WITH A DESIRE FOR RELATIONSHIPS

In Genesis 2:18 God says, "It is not good for man to be alone." Up until this point, Adam had been alone. He had been enjoying the garden, his Creator, and creation, but had no one with whom he could relate. Brandon points out that when Adam awoke and found his companion Eve by his side, he rejoiced in song. This pre-sin reaction to his spouse should remind us how God intended for us to cherish those close to us.

How has altering your behavior toward someone else in a positive way changed the dynamic of your relationship?

Brandon reminds us that "the fall is where sin disordered our sense of belonging." Sin brought division. Division brings rivalry. Rivalry brings isolation. Isolation is the opposite of God's intention for us. He desires for us to have relationships with one another and find belonging there. Rather, we find the world significantly polarized.

There are many people in our own neighborhoods who feel isolated and alone. God created us with the innate and inherent desire for close relationships with one another. **How should this knowledge impact the way we look at someone else's emotional need for companionship? Whom could you make more of an effort to befriend?**

How can we as a church break down barriers that have been set up by the rivalry mindset?

JESUS REPAIRS THE DIVISION CREATED BY SIN

Brandon brings to light God's refusal to allow sin to be the end for humankind. He says, "God set out to fix what's broken. He sent His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, so that he might repair our division once and for all."

Read Ephesians 2:1-11.

How are we described in verse 1?

We can all relate to something on the list of transgressions listed in verses 2-3. None of us are exempt, but the most beautiful words come at the beginning of verse 4. In nearly every translation of Scripture, the first two words are, "But God."

There is no one else who could save us but God! When we were dead to our sin, He came in and saved the day! And that's putting it mildly! He saved eternity! The rest of that passage goes on to describe all that was done for us.

**What does God show us despite our need for punishment? (verse 4)
In verse 8, by what have we been saved?**

*Note: to further discuss God's grace and mercy for us, see the **Go Deeper** section at the end of this study.*

Our salvation through faith in Jesus is an amazing thing, but we discover that in Jesus all other divisions in humanity find unity.

Read Ephesians 2:14-18.

The division of Jew and Gentile created a seemingly impossible gap between people in the first century, yet Jesus reconciled them both to God. That reconciliation continues today among many other opposing groups, who learn that they have more in common through Jesus than their apparent differences.

What divisions exist today that can become swallowed up in the reconciliation found in Christ?

GOD RENEWS AND RESTORES RELATIONSHIPS

While we will never see full restoration on earth, we know that God has plans to make things new again. As Brandon points out, "Already the power over sin has been broken, but the full experience of Christ's victory is not yet realized on earth."

Read Romans 7:21-25.

How does Paul talk about the battle between righteousness and evil happening within himself?

**To whom does Paul attribute freedom from sin?
How do you handle the daily struggle between the desire to do what is right and sin nature?**

Read Revelation 7:9-12. There will come a day when we will all be united. We will no longer be divided, and our goal will be to praise our heavenly Father. John is blessed with this vision of all of heaven glorifying God.

How does this knowledge impact your vision of your relationships with those around you?

*Note: for further discussion about Christian community, see the **Go Deeper** section at the end of this study.*

LAST WORD

Division is of worldwide prevalence. Because of sin, relationships are broken and have little hope of being restored. We have such a desire to be a part of a group and develop closeness with others that this tends to be extremely harmful to many.

While we cannot fully grasp a world without disagreements and division, we can all agree how beautiful this image is. Brandon insightfully points out that "None of our earthly divisions will endure into God's kingdom. Before the throne of God is a place of belonging, just like it was always supposed to be."

Horizontal lines for writing.

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting.

Christian Community

Read Romans 12:10-13 and answer the questions.

- Describe this picture of Christian community shown in this passage.
- How do you see this being practiced in our church today?
- Why is it so important to have Christian community?

Grace and Mercy

Only God can pull us out of sin and death and raise us by grace into love and life with Him. Reread Ephesians 2:1-11 and answer the following questions. You may also need a dictionary.

- Define grace.
- Define mercy.
- How do grace and mercy differ?
- Give an example of someone offering you grace.
- Give an example of someone showing you mercy.

Read Hosea 12:6. Justice can be defined as fairness, or getting what you deserve. We have all had moments where we receive justice. **How does this impact the way you view God's gifts of mercy and grace, knowing you deserve justice?**

Read Micah 6:8.

- Based on this scripture, what does God require of us?
- Do you find this instruction challenging? Why or why not?
- How can you show grace to others?
- How have you been able to show mercy to someone?
- How can we walk in humility?

Read Genesis 3:15. God's plan for restoration was embedded in the story of the first sin. God addresses His plan to redeem man and destroy evil. It is prophesied throughout the Old Testament and brought to fruition in the New Testament.

God's grace and mercy is such a gift to us! And it's a gift we are supposed to share with others. In the coming week, find someone to befriend and share the gospel with. It's because of Jesus that we have hope of redemption and restoration. We should tell of Him as often as we can!