

## PREPARATION

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Spend the week studying Ephesians 2:1-10. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools to enhance your preparation.

**DETERMINE** | which discussion points and study questions will work best for your group

**PRAY** | for our pastors and this week's message, the upcoming group time, your group members and their openness to God's Word.

**LANDING POINT** | Playing a role in God's story gives you ultimate meaning and satisfaction in life.

### ◦ Remember the 4 Rules for Small Group Discussion

1. **Confidentiality.** What's said in the group stays in the group.
2. **No cross-talk.** Be considerate of others as they share. Refrain from side conversations and texting during group time.
3. **No fixing.** We are not in the group to fix each other. Jesus does that part.
4. **Sharing.** Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Don't talk too much or too little. Every person brings something valuable to the group.

## INTRODUCTION

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*As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.*

### The thrill is gone

Kyle graduated three years ago. Overall, he was a good student, graduating near the top of his class. He found a job after graduation that seemed to offer what he wanted—a good income, 401k, plenty of vacation and potential to advance in the company. At first he was excited about going to work; he felt like he was going somewhere. After all, his company is highly respected in the tech industry. However, after almost three years of grinding it out in the office, he's starting to wonder what's the point. "All these long hours for what? A bigger house? A nicer car?" He fills his free time with toys, trips and temporary thrills, but he can't escape the feeling that he's bored with life. Kyle feels listless, like a tire caught in the mud and just spinning.

Kyle's story isn't uncommon. We were designed to seek meaning and significance in life. We want our lives to matter and for others to see the value in us. Unfortunately, many seek significance in lesser things: climbing the corporate ladder, being an adrenaline junky, following the lives of celebrities or living vicariously through a sports team.

## INTRODUCTION [CONT'D]

Why are so many people changing jobs and churches today? One big reason is people are looking for satisfaction and not finding it. But are they looking for the right thing? This week your group will discuss how playing a role in God's story gives you ultimate meaning and satisfaction in life.

Do you relate to anything in Kyle's story? If so, what?

Explain the following statement in your own words: "We want our lives to matter and for others to see the value in us."

## LEARN

Select 2-3 questions to discuss as a group.

### ◦ Dead in Sin (Eph. 2:1-3)

The second chapter of Ephesians begins with a grim portrait of Paul's readers' lives before salvation. Without Christ, they were lost. They lived only for themselves and "followed the ways of this world." Paul describes his readers as having been dead in their sin. Their spiritual EKG was a flat line, which meant nothing in them desired a relationship with God. Like all humanity, these readers were deserving of God's wrath. Why? Because rebellion against God must be punished; sin must be atoned for.

How does a healthy view of sin (and its consequences) help us live better?

Why do think many avoid talking about God's wrath today?

### ◦ Alive with Christ (Eph. 2:4-10)

The situation for Paul's readers looks hopeless. Because they were dead in their sin, they couldn't do anything to change the condition of their heart. Only God has the power to do that. At the point where all hope seemed lost, God stepped in as the Hero. Verses 4-5 give us the turning point in God's (and our) story: "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in [sin]—it is by grace you have been saved."

The Gospel is God's saving story. God's Spirit causes a sinner's spiritual EKG begins to spike and beep. And Jesus took the punishment (or wrath) for sin we deserved. Why does God save sinners? Paul says God does it to express His infinite grace and kindness. Believers' lives are a testament to the love and grace of God as seen in Jesus. This is our role in God's story.

Divide the group into pairs. Take turns sharing the Gospel story according to Paul's explanation in Ephesians.

How would your life be different if you saw it more as a "testament to the love and grace of God as seen in Jesus"?


**LIVE**

Select 2-3 questions from this section to answer.

How do Paul's words about the Gospel help us find meaning and satisfaction in life? Three observations help us answer that question.

### o You are part of God's story

First, you only play a part in God's story. Your role in God's story is special and significant. However, it's only a role. You aren't the main character in the story. God is. You will find significance in life when you stop trying to take center stage in God's story.

What in this observation stands out to you? Why?

What changes (if any) would you need to make God the main character in your life's story?

### o Your design matches God's plan for you

Isn't it incredible that God is saying something glorious through your life? He wants to use the skills, gifts and passions He gave you to show others what kind of God He is. Each of us is "God's handiwork," and God has already prepared good works for us to do. You will find satisfaction in life when you use what God has given you for His glory.

What in this observation stands out to you? Why?

Complete the following sentence: "I feel most alive and "in my sweet spot" when I ..."

### o You choose to live in God's story

Everyday we must choose to live for God's story or your own. If you want to see change in your life, choosing to live for God in the everyday makes a difference. Author Paul Tripp speaks to this when he writes:

*For the Christian who finds their hope in the person and work of Jesus Christ, change doesn't take place in big, dramatic moments. Rather, the transforming work of grace operates in 10,000 little moments of life more than it does in a series of two or three life-altering events.<sup>1</sup>*

Only when you choose to live for God's story will you experience true fulfillment in life.

What in this observation stands out to you? Why?

Do you agree or disagree with Tripp's statement? Explain your answer.

1. Paul Tripp, "Should You Make a New Year's Resolution?," December 30, 2015, accessed September 7, 2016, <http://www.paultripp.com/wednesdays-word/posts/should-you-make-a-new-years-resolution>.

 LEAD

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Select 1 question from this section to ask your group.

### ◦ Being a people of the Story

The bottom line is: it's not about you; it's about Jesus. The Gospel is His story and He's invited you to play a role in it. Understanding your place in the story gives life ultimate meaning and significance. Knowing Him helps you see your design, which will make your life and work more satisfying. Choosing everyday to live for God's story makes life's moments—big and small—more fulfilling.

The good news is you're not alone in these things. You have a supporting cast to help you live for God's story. The world says to make your own path in life. God says to walk His path alongside others and encourage one another to find meaning and significance.

**Who are the important people in your supporting cast? How do they help you live for God's story?**

**Identify one thing your group can do to be mutually encouraging with one another?**

 PRAY

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Thank God for His salvation. That He saved you from death and wrath, but also saved you to experience new life and purpose in Him. Ask Him to understand your design and what good works He has for you. Seek His wisdom in how to mutually encourage one another to choose to live for God's story everyday.

 FOLLOW UP

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Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- Read Romans 12:1-5 and reflect on how Paul's instruction relates to this week's discussion.
- Ask the group to share any stories or lessons learned where they see God at work in their life.

 **COMMENTARY**

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- **Ephesians at a glance.**

A major theme in Paul's letter to the Ephesians is how Christ has reconciled us (and all creation) to God. Multiple times in the letter Paul expounds on the love, grace and power of God in salvation. Another theme is how Christ has united different groups and cultures into one church. These two themes work together to show how God is reestablishing shalom (Hb. "peace, wholeness, well-being") both vertically (humanity to God) and horizontally (person to person).

- **Defining the Gospel.**

In an interview with Christianity Today, author Scot McKnight defines the Gospel this way: "The Gospel is to announce that the Story of Jesus, who is Messiah [King], Lord and Savior, fulfills or completes the Story of Israel. It is the good news that God's promises have now been realized in Jesus Messiah, Lord and Savior."<sup>2</sup> McKnight believes many current models of understanding the Gospel focus disproportionately on personal salvation rather than how Jesus fulfills Israel's story (the Old Testament) with His arrival (in the Gospels) as the rightful king in God's kingdom.

- **Salvation in the New Testament.**

"The death and resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate focal moment for salvation. Drawing on the sacrificial images and institutions of ancient Israel, these writers associate Jesus's death with "atonement" (John 1:29, 36; 6:51; 1 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 9:24–26) and "reconciliation" (Rom. 5:1–11; 2 Cor. 5:18–20). It affects the whole cosmos (Rom. 8:19–23; Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:19–20), and his resurrection has present significance (Rom. 13:11–14; 1 Cor. 15:1–2), and it also points to future deliverance from impending judgment and wrath (1 Thess. 1:9–10; cf. Rom. 1:18–2:11; 5:9–11; Phil. 3:20; Titus 2:13). Thus, salvation involves life and well-being in the future kingdom of God (Luke 13:28–30; 22:29–30; 23:43; 1 Cor. 2:9–10; 11:26; 1 Thess. 4:16–17; Rev. 21:1–22:5)."<sup>3</sup>

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2. Ed Stetzer, "The King Jesus Gospel: A Conversation with Scot McKnight," Christianity Today, February 2012, accessed September 7, 2016, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2012/february/king-jesus-gospel-conversation-with-scot-mcknight.html>.

3. John E. Alsup, "Salvation," ed. Mark Allan Powell, The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary [Revised and Updated] (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 909.