



BY TONY MERIDA

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

## 1. BELONGING

*Read Ephesians 2 v 18 – 3 v 19*

1. What images does Paul use to describe the church in 2 v 18-22? What does he want us to see about the church's identity?
2. Paul's mission is to preach to the Gentiles. What is his ultimate purpose, and the purpose of the church (3 v 1-13)?
3. What does Paul pray for his readers (v 14-19)? Why do you think he includes the phrase "together with all the Lord's holy people"—and how does that change your understanding of his prayer?
4. In your church, what does it look like to commit and belong? How could you encourage one another to do this? What rewards do you hope to reap?
5. What's the danger in not belonging to a specific local congregation?
6. What will you pray for your church, based on this passage?

## 2. WELCOMING

*Read James 2 v 1-13*

1. How does James show that favoritism is not just unhelpful but wrong (v 4-7)?
2. Why is it such a serious thing to do (v 8-13)?
3. Why does favoritism dishonor not only other people but God himself? And conversely, why is acting without partiality a reflection of God's own character and actions?
4. What types of favoritism are particularly tempting in your setting? What are you and your church most likely to discriminate on the basis of?
5. In what ways is your church strong at welcoming outsiders? Where could it improve?
6. How can you personally be a part of that? What might need to change about the way you act or speak, both at church gatherings and during the week?

### 3. GATHERING

*Read Hebrews 12 v 18-29*

1. The author of Hebrews is comparing the moment when the Israelites gathered at Mount Sinai (v 18-21) to the state of affairs now (v 22-24). What's different and why? How does this serve as a motivation to gather as a church?
2. The description of verses 22-24 is in one sense looking to the future gathering of all God's people in heaven. But it's also describing something of what happens in our gatherings now. Who are we gathering with? How should that impact the way we think about our Sunday meetings?
3. Why is it so urgent to listen to God's voice and to worship him together (v 25-29)?
4. On a Sunday, do you think of yourself as being there to contribute to and build up others in your congregation? How could you do this more?
5. What aspects of church gatherings do you personally find most precious? Why is it so valuable to gather to hear God's word, share the Lord's Supper, sing, and pray together?
6. What could you do to prepare well for Sunday? What "holy and happy habits" could you build, and how could that make a difference to your experience of corporate worship?

#### 4. CARING

*Read Galatians 5 v 16 – 6 v 10*

1. In 5 v 16-25, what reasons does Paul give for doing good to one another? What makes it possible to be caring and not selfish?
2. What dangers might we fall into as we seek to care for one another (6 v 1, 3-4, 9)? What ideas do you have on how you can avoid those while not holding back on caring for others?
3. What is our aim and ultimate hope as we do good to one another? How does this help us to persevere?
4. What is the greatest challenge in these verses for you personally?
5. Is your church one in which restoring, burden-bearing, sharing, and doing good take place? Which one is your weak point? What could you do to step up in that area?
6. What steps could you take to educate or train yourself (whether personally or as a congregation) in how to care for others effectively?

## 5. SERVING

*Read Romans 12 v 1-21*

1. What does whole-life worship look like, and what motivates it (v 1-2)?
2. How should we see our own identity (v 5)? How does this help us to serve well?
3. Verses 9-21 contain some challenging instructions. Why is doing these things hard?  
What difference can they make (v 21)?
4. What gifts has God given you? How can you use them with excellence, passion, and humility for the good of your church?
5. What needs do you see in your church? How could you meet them?
6. Is there anything in Paul's instructions that is lacking in your church's life or in your own life? How will you pray in response to this passage?

## 6. HONORING

*Read 1 Peter 5 v 1-5*

1. What dangers does Peter want his readers to avoid—both elders and other members of the church?
2. What is the purpose of elders and pastors seeking to lead in the way Peter instructs?
3. What is the purpose of church members being “subject to the elders”?
4. In what areas might people find it especially hard to submit to their elders? Have you had experiences of this kind of tension in church? What would humility, respect, and love look like in those situations?
5. In what ways are your elders and pastors a good example to you? How could you follow their example?
6. What might encourage each of your elders and pastors this week? How could you help them keep in mind Peter’s vision for leadership? What will you pray for them?

## 7. WITNESSING

*Read 1 Peter 3 v 13-17*

1. Why do you think honoring and revering Christ (v 15) makes it easier to avoid fearing others (v 14)?
2. What results should there be from doing good (v 13, 14, 16)?
3. As we engage with others, why is it important both to articulate a reason for our hope and to speak with gentleness and respect, as verse 15 directs us to?
4. Are you full of hope? What can you do to cultivate this virtue? How would you explain the reason for it?
5. What does it look like to speak with “gentleness and respect”? In what kinds of relationships is doing so particularly easy or particularly challenging? How can you help one another to grow in this area?
6. In what ways are you currently pursuing obedience to the call to make disciples (Matthew 28 v 19) both individually, as a group, and as a whole church? How could you be most effective as witnesses to your particular community?

## 8. SENDING

*Read Acts 11 v 19-30; 13 v 1-3*

1. How do we see God at work through people as the Antioch church is established (11 v 19-25)?
2. What different roles do Barnabas and Saul play?
3. What attitude do the Antioch Christians have toward other churches, toward Saul and Barnabas, toward unreached people, and toward God himself? What does this teach you as a local church today?
4. How outward-looking are you as a church? What would be one step you could take to grow in this area together?
5. In your church, what could you do to follow the example of Barnabas? How could you encourage others to do the same?
6. What will you pray for your church, your community, and the world in the light of this passage?