

WEEK 2: September 13–19, 2026

Reading: Ephesians 2–6; Philippians 1–2

Principal Chapter: Ephesians 2

Spiritual Practice: Speak

Core Emphasis: Grace Received and Grace Shared

Read a CHAPTER a Day

SMALL GROUP LEADERS' GUIDE

Leader Preparation Checklist

- ☐ **Read Ephesians 2–6 and Philippians 1–2.** Circle repeated words and phrases: *grace, peace, reconciliation, unity, new life, humility, service, life “in Christ.”* Highlight God’s gift of grace, reconciliation across dividing walls, and the church’s call to embody grace in its shared life.
- ☐ **Review the historical note below.** Prepare to lead a discussion about Jewish–Gentile reconciliation carefully, ensuring participants do not walk away thinking Gentile Christians replace Jewish people in God’s purposes.
- ☐ **Spiritual Practice: Speak.** Practice reading Ephesians 2:1–10 and 2:11–22 aloud, slowly and clearly. Invite two or three participants to read aloud different sections of the passage, if possible.
- ☐ **Prepare the meeting space.** If meeting online, identify reader(s) before beginning the practice. If meeting in person, have a few different Bible translations available.
- ☐ **Pray for each person by name.** Invite the Holy Spirit to help each person in the group receive God’s grace with humility and to share that grace generously with others.

Historical Note on Ephesians:

Background: Ephesians focuses on God’s purpose in Jesus Christ: to bring all things together in Christ and create one reconciled people. Ephesians 2 weaves these two threads together. In verses 1–10, Paul declares salvation is a gift from God. We are saved by grace through faith. In verses 11–22, he explains how Christ breaks down hostility between Jews and Gentiles, reconciles them into one new humanity, and builds them together into a dwelling place for God.

Ephesians chapters 3–6 further develop Paul’s vision. The church is called to grow into unity, live humbly and with love, practice forgiveness, and put on the full armor of God. Grace, then, is not simply private forgiveness or personal assurance. Grace creates community and reconciliation. Those who receive God’s mercy are called to live out that grace in humility, hospitality, forgiveness, peace-making, mutual service, and love.

Interpretive Care: Ephesians 2 addresses reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles. Do not describe or refer to this passage as though the church has replaced Israel or as though Jewish identity has been wiped away. Paul celebrates that Gentiles have been brought near to God’s people through God’s grace. This does not mean Jewish people are rejected or their faith has become meaningless. Christ breaks down dividing walls so hostility can end and those once far off are brought near.

This passage could prompt sensitive reactions related to shame, feelings of spiritual unworthiness, family estrangement, divorce, exclusion from community, division in church, racism or nationalism, abuses of power, lack of self-worth, or divisions among social or economic classes. Remind participants that receiving God’s grace and reconciliation may not always look like affection for one another. In situations of harm, abuse, injustice, or dangerous relationships, Christian reconciliation will look like truth-telling, accountability, personal and communal safety, and justice.

If necessary, say, “This passage calls us to peace. Peace does not mean avoiding difficult conversations. Let’s bring our whole truths to this time together, listen to others carefully, and trust God will lead us toward justice and healing.”

Opening (10 min)

Welcome & Check-In

Welcome each participant by name. Briefly remind the group that this is a place to listen generously to others, speak honestly about scripture, and receive God's Word together.

Check-in Question: Where have you seen or experienced grace this week from God, another person, or even yourself? Invite one-sentence responses.

Opening Prayer

God of mercy and grace, you have made us alive with Christ and brought us into your household by grace. Open our hearts to hear your word. Help us receive your grace with gratitude and share your grace through mercy, forgiveness, and peace. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Key Themes (10 min)

As you read Ephesians 2–6 and Philippians 1–2 this week, which words, images, or ideas stood out to you? Today we'll focus on grace as a gift, reconciliation, and unity in Christ.

Grace as a Gift: Ephesians 2 opens with what humans cannot do—bring salvation to ourselves. God acts in mercy and love to make us alive with Christ. Salvation is entirely a gift by grace through faith.

- Key passage: Ephesians 2:1–10
- What words or phrases from Ephesians 2:1–10 help you understand grace as a gift?

Reconciliation and Unity in Christ: Christ's work reconciles more than individuals to God. Christ breaks down hostility to create a reconciled people, in which Jews and Gentiles are near to one another.

- Key passages: Ephesians 2:11–22; 4:1–6
- What does Paul mean when he says, "Christ Jesus our peace"?

Ephesians 2 and Philippians 1–2 remind us that grace is received as a gift from God; lived out in reconciliation with others; and expressed through humility, forgiveness, service, and love.

Historical Context (8 min)

Who Is Writing? Ephesians names Paul as the author. He presents himself as an apostle, servant, and prisoner for Christ Jesus, writing to churches that include Gentile believers. Paul and Timothy wrote Philippians to the church in Philippi.

To Whom? Ephesians is addressed to churches in Ephesus. Ephesus was a city in Roman-controlled Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). Many believe Ephesians was intended for churches throughout the region. Philippians is addressed to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi. Philippi was a Roman colony in the province of Macedonia. Paul has deep affection and gratitude for this church.

What Is Happening? The church included both Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus. This created practical and theological questions. How could people with different histories, practices, cultures, and social positioning belong together in one community?

- Ephesians announces God has made peace through Christ! The hostility that separated Jews and Gentiles has been overcome. Through Christ, Gentile believers now belong in God's household.
- Philippians exhorts the church's life together. Believers should live in unity, care for others, and live with humility. Paul encourages them to care about others as well as themselves.

Why Does This Matter? Receive God's grace as a gift. Live in reconciliation with others who are different from us. Embody that grace through humility, hospitality, forgiveness, peace-making, service to others, and love.

Read Ephesians 2:11–22. Paul writes to communities made up of Jewish and Gentile believers. Both groups had different histories, customs, and life experiences. Paul writes that, in Christ, those who were once far away have been brought near. Dividing walls of hostility have been broken down.

Jesus reconciles Jews and Gentiles into one household of faith. Philippians teaches us how to live out that grace-filled life daily. Believers are called to be humble and to care for one another. Receiving God's grace does not depend on what we do. It is a gift through which we receive new life. It teaches us how to live and relate to one another in peace.

- What part of church history helps you understand Ephesians 2:11–22?
- What do you long to see reconciled in the church or world?

Leader Note: *Paul's letter about unity does not mean that people must shed their history, culture, or identity. Instead, through Christ, we are welcomed near to God and called to live in peace with others.*

Reflection on Personal Practice (10 min)

Invite participants to reflect on their experience of reading Ephesians and Philippians each day. Remind the group that Read a Chapter a Day's purpose is not just to finish daily readings or learn new information. It is to cultivate attentiveness to God's presence and voice through scripture.

- What did you find easiest or most challenging about reading one chapter each day this week?
- When did you sense or experience God speaking, comforting, challenging, or surprising you through Ephesians or Philippians this week?

Expect a range of responses. Some participants may love reading Ephesians; others may find it dense. Philippians lends itself to personal application; some might say it's sentimental.

Ephesians 2 can feel expansive and theologically rich. Philippians chapters 1 and 2 invite personal reflection on humility, Christlike joy, and grace. Some passages will feel accessible. Others will require time, patience, and repeated reading.

Spiritual Practice: Speak (7 min)

This week's spiritual practice is **Speak**. Before Bibles were accessible to every household, God's people heard scripture read and proclaimed aloud in worship. Reading scripture aloud helps us slow down, listen intentionally with our whole being, and receive the passage as something spoken to the gathered community.

Instruction: For this practice, read Ephesians 2:1–10. Ask the group to listen attentively. Invite two readers for Ephesians 2:1–3 and Ephesians 2:4–10. (*If meeting online, ask readers to mute themselves and unmute when it is their turn to read.*)

- Say: "As you hear these words, listen for a phrase, sentence, or image that speaks to you. Notice what you hear about *grace, peace, welcome, belonging*, and *reconciliation*. There's no need to explain or interrupt the reading. Simply listen."

Scripture Reading: After reading is finished, allow thirty seconds of silence. Then ask, "What phrase or image did you hear God speak to you?"

Response: Invite two to three participants to respond briefly.

- When we hear scripture read aloud, we hear it not only as individuals reading privately but as members of the household of faith. Today, we heard Ephesians 2 call us near to God; we are drawn together in peace.

Application & Discussion Questions (10 min)

Discussion Questions

- **Grace Received:** What does Ephesians 2:8–10 teach us about grace as a gift rather than something we earn?
- **Grace Shared:** How will receiving God's gift of grace change how you treat people who are different from you?

If time allows, briefly connect the texts to John Wesley's explanation of grace.

- *Prevenient Grace* – God comes toward us before we can come toward God.
- *Justifying Grace* – God receives us and pardons us when we believe in Christ.
- *Sanctifying Grace* – God continues to transform us through love and holiness.

Point out that each of these gifts is freely given. Each is also life-transforming.

Application/Invitation/Call to Action

Allow a few seconds of silence. Ask one or both questions:

- How will you receive God's gift of grace more deeply this week?
- In what situations are you invited to share grace through forgiveness, hospitality, humility, reconciliation, or welcome?

Invite participants to name one concrete practice for the upcoming week. Consider the following:

- Forgive someone who hurt them.
- Make time to listen to someone who is different.
- Invite a neighbor into their home.
- Make a phone call to someone who lives alone.
- Pray for healing and reconciliation.
- Practice humility during a conflict.
- Worry less about earning God's love by proving their self-worth.

Prayer & Sending (5 min)

Shared Prayer

Invite two or three participants to share brief prayer requests: a personal need, a concern for the church or world, or somewhere they long to see God's grace and peace shine brightly.

Closing Prayer

Merciful God, you have made us alive with Christ and brought us into your household through grace. Give us humble and grateful hearts to receive your gifts. Break down dividing walls of hostility between us, make peace where there is fear and danger, and show us how to receive and share your gift of grace. Fill us with the mind of Christ that we may love one another in humility and joy. Draw us together into your family, a dwelling place for your Spirit. Amen.

Reminders

Before participants leave, make sure they know to:

- Daily readings for next week are Philippians 3–4; Colossians 1–4; and 1 Thessalonians 1. Look at the chart that includes the focus scripture for daily readings.
- Gather with other Read a Chapter a Day small groups next Wednesday.
- Continue the conversation through the Read a Chapter a Day Facebook group page and weekly emails.

Leader Notes & Reflection

For Next Week

- Which question or small-group activity do you want to spend more time on?
- Was there a concept or participant who needed more care, time, or pastoral sensitivity?
- What would make next week's session more welcoming and fruitful?

Notes

[illegible]