



Come Together: Learning to Overcome Differences

Our current sermon series is exploring the concept of overcoming differences that arise in the vast array of relationships in our lives. Let's look together at what it means to be followers of Christ, as we commit to doing our part in overcoming differences between us and God, us and the church, us and our family, and us and the world. We pray that the next few weeks will enrich your faith, and help you live out a Christian form of unity with those in your life in the midst of a very divided world.

Memorize God's Word:

Individual: Take a few days and do your best to memorize the scripture passage for the week.

Group: Choose one person from the group to commit the week's scripture passage to memory in order to present it to the group the following week.

Read the story:

Individual: After you've committed the passage to memory, read two different translations of the scripture for the week.

Group: At your next group meeting, have two different group members read the story using different Bible translations.

Tell the story:

Individual: Recite the story aloud from memory, or tell it to a friend or family member.

Group: Introduce the person who has learned the story for this week. Be ready to assist them if they get stuck at any point.

Rebuild the story:

Individual: Re-read the story to fact check yourself.

Group: Use questions to help the group highlight the main points of the story and correct any omissions or misrepresentations of the story. The point is not to point out the story teller's mistakes, but rather to point people to the Word to ensure everyone understands it accurately.

Dig into the Word:

Individual: Work through the questions and pray about what God reveals to you through His word. Discuss with a Christian friend or family member, if you choose.

Group: Work through the questions as a group, celebrating the work God is already doing in each person's life, and encouraging each other to trust Him in the places that need growth.

Overcoming Differences with God

Week 1: Read Romans 5: 6-11

Discovery Questions:

What do we learn about God in this passage?

What is Paul teaching the church in Rome?

What are you learning personally?

What are the main themes of what Paul is teaching here?

Life Application:

What was our condition when Christ chose to die on our behalf? Why is this important?

Considering who Jesus died for, how does Jesus' death demonstrate God's immense love and mercy?

How do you see this divine love differing from the love we possess as humans? From the love you demonstrate in your own life?

How might knowing the depth of God's love for you, in spite of your sinfulness, shape how you treat others? How might this knowledge shape how you respond to God Himself?

Prayer:

Father, thank you for your incredible sacrifice on our behalf through the death of your son. Thank you for sending Him to die for us, while we were still stuck in our sin. Thank you for loving us first, and for making a way for us to be in relationship with you. Help us to love like you love, even when it's not returned, and shape us into the image of your son as we walk with Him. In the name of Jesus, amen.

Overcoming Differences within the Church

Week 2: Read John 17: 20-26

Discovery Questions:

What do we learn about God in this section of scripture?

What is Jesus teaching the disciples in this passage?

What are you learning personally?

What are the main themes of what Jesus is speaking here?

Life Application:

Who is Jesus praying for in this passage? How does that connect with you personally?

Given the broad scope of the church that came to be, across all nations and people groups, what is Jesus praying for when He prays for unity, and how is that type of unity even possible?

What challenges in the church today do you see that make unity difficult?

The last words of Jesus in the final sentence of this passage are the key to the entire section, and to all the challenges that face the church. What is the key, and how does it make a difference:

In the life of a believer?

In your own life?

In the life of believers who disagree?

Do you truly believe that this makes all the difference? Why or why not?

Prayer:

Father, thank you for your church, for the family of believers that we are a part of in you. Lord, thank you for the unity that you create in your people through your Spirit. We pray that the Spirit would fill each of us so that we would see our Christian brothers and sisters through your eyes of love and grace. Change our hearts to love deeply in spite of our differences, and help us work together out of the love that flows from Jesus living in each of us.

In the name of Jesus, amen.

Overcoming Differences with Family

Week 3: Read Ephesians 5:21 - 6:4

Discovery Questions:

What do we learn about God in this section of scripture?

What is Paul teaching the Ephesian church in this passage?

What are you learning personally?

What are the main themes of what Paul is teaching here?

Life Application:

How do you see the command in verse 21 play out throughout the rest of the passage?

In the context of v22, what has to happen first before a Godly relationship is even possible with a husband? In what ways could a vibrant relationship with the Lord be reflected in a woman's relationship with her husband?

Think back to the first week of this series, and the condition we were in when Christ died for us. Then recall, or read about in John 18-19, the experiences Jesus freely submitted to on the way to the cross on behalf of all believers for all time. If husbands are to love their wives like Christ loves the church, in that context, what kind of sacrificial love would that entail?

How would it change your marriage, or a potential future marriage, if both spouses loved each other from the context of the previous two questions?

For those who are parents, or hope to be parents one day, how should 6:4 shape the way you care for your children? How might this make 6:1-3 easier for your children?

Prayer:

Father, thank you for the gift of marriage and families. Lord, we lift up our sinful nature, our desire to control, and our misplaced priorities to you, and ask you to sift us, removing the junk, and leaving only what is of you. Help us to love each other well, to respect and honor each other, and do all of it out of our love for you. Help us to love our children like you love us, to show them mercy, grace, gentleness, and love, even in correction. Help our families to point each other back toward you throughout our day to day life, and to be a beautiful reflection of sacrificial love to those around us. In the name of Jesus, amen.

Overcoming Differences with Outsiders

Week 4: Read Colossians 4: 5-6

Discovery Questions:

What do we learn about God in this section of scripture?

What is Paul teaching the Colossian church in this passage?

What are you learning personally?

What are the main themes of what Paul is teaching here?

Life Application:

What might it look like to make the most of every opportunity with people who don't know the Lord: in conversation, in action, in kindness, and in opportunities to serve selflessly?
Why is Godly wisdom important here?

Paul instructs that our conversations should always be full of grace. With whom do you find it most difficult to be full of grace in conversation? Why?

What difference might it make for Christians to offer grace to those who don't share their same faith?

Paul also says our conversation should be "seasoned with salt." Some theologians equate this to flavoring our conversations with charm, wit and humor, as the Greeks equated salt with wit. Do grace and humor exemplify what most people would automatically associate with Christians? Why would conversations marked by grace and joyful humor make a difference in how unbelievers view those who belong to Christ? How would that set apart a believer in today's society?

Prayer:

Father, thank you for the opportunity to extend grace and love to the world around us. Help us to show those around us who you are, because of who you've grown us to be as we walk with you. Give us wisdom, grace, and good humor as we deal with others, and help who we are draw others to you. In the name of Jesus, amen.