

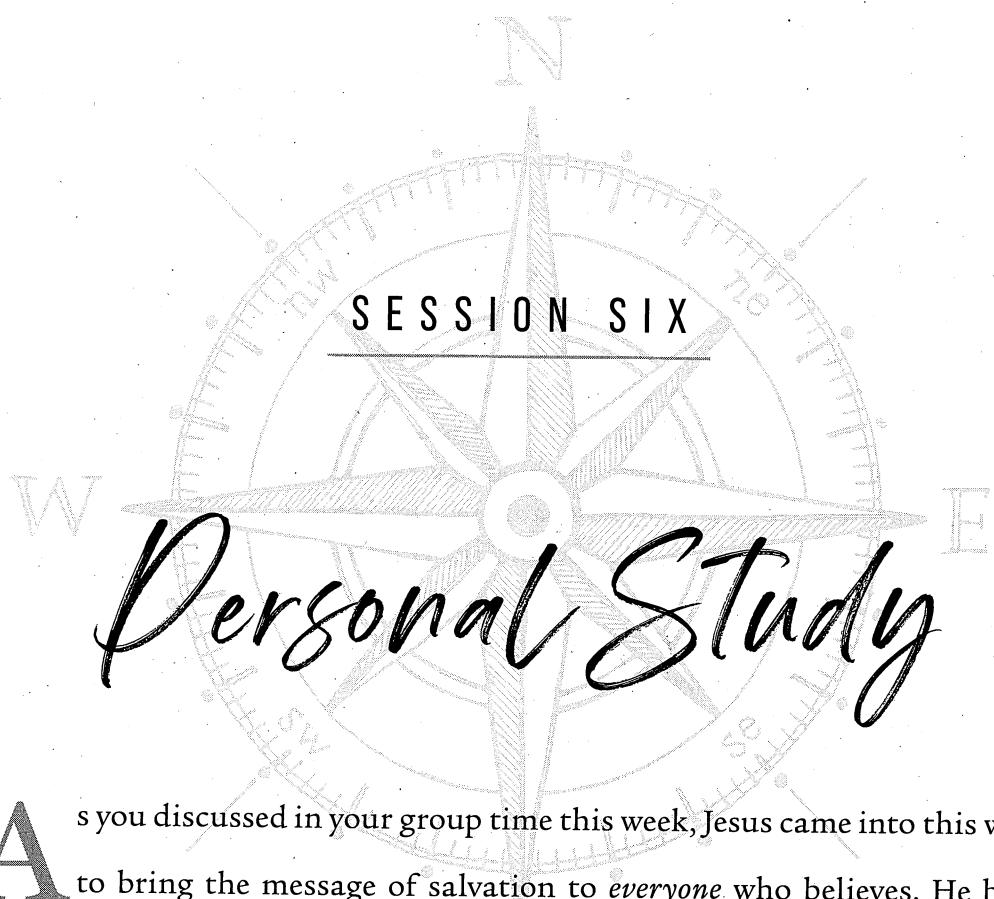
Respond | 10 MINUTES

Review the outline for the video teaching and any notes you took. In the space below, write down your most significant takeaway from this session.

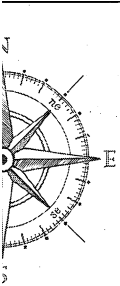
Pray | 10 MINUTES

End your time by praying as a group, thanking God that he does not exclude anyone from his grace. Ask if anyone has any prayer requests to share. Write those requests down in the space below so you and your group members can pray about them in the week ahead.

Name	Request
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As you discussed in your group time this week, Jesus came into this world to bring the message of salvation to *everyone* who believes. He broke down the cultural barriers that existed in his day of exactly who should be considered “in” and “out” of God’s kingdom—and we are the beneficiaries as a result. As you explore this theme in this week’s final personal study, write down your responses to the questions in the spaces provided. If you are reading *In the Footsteps of the Savior* alongside this study, first review chapters 11–12 in the book.



- Day 1 -

OLD WAY VS. NEW WAY

You may have read parts of Leviticus during your group session this week. Leviticus is a book full of instructions given to Moses by God for the Hebrew people. The Israelites were prone to straying from God's will. The Lord wanted to live among his people, but their sin prevented him from doing it. So God created laws so that his people would remain clean through certain practices and rituals and so that he could continue living among them.²⁵

Eating certain foods, not touching anything related to death, and performing sacrifices helped the Israelites maintain their purity and standing before God. These laws set the Israelites apart from their Canaanite (or "Gentile") neighbors. Therefore, to the Israelites, the Gentiles were typically viewed as unclean and not worthy of being in God's presence.

Understanding this helps us to understand why it was so significant for Peter to say that the Gentiles' hearts had been purified by faith (see Acts 15:9). For hundreds of years, the Jews had attained purity one way—by keeping the law. Now Peter was saying *anyone* could be made pure. They did not have to keep the law. Such a declaration would have been shocking to the Jewish people of the day. You can see why many would be reluctant to believe it.

After all, Peter was asking them to do nothing less than *completely change the way they thought about purity and what it takes to be in God's presence*. Jesus had disrupted the entire system of purity through his sacrifice on the cross. He made it possible for anyone's heart to be made clean and for anyone to enter God's presence. It was "disruptive theology" back then. But it can still be disruptive to our theologies and ways of understanding today.

READ | Acts 28:23–32

REFLECT

1. In this passage, Paul is speaking to Jewish officials while he is under house arrest in Rome. Luke describes his situation in the book of Acts: "When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him. Three days later he called together the local Jewish leaders" (28:16–17). In Paul's meeting with the Jewish leaders,

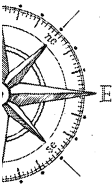
he quotes Isaiah 6:9–10, with which this audience would have been very familiar. According to Acts 28:25, how did these Jewish officials respond to him?

2. Why do you think the Jewish officials were so offended by Paul's words?

3. What are some of the ways the gospel offends people today? Why do you think it is so difficult for some people to accept the good news that Christ offers?

4. Who are the "Gentiles" in your life—the people you tend to avoid, or dislike, or don't understand? How does it feel to know that even these people are purified in the name of Jesus?

PRAY | Think more about the "Gentiles" in your life who you tend to avoid, dislike, and not understand. Confess to Jesus the people you distance yourself from or are tempted to believe are beyond salvation. Ask him to help you see these people in a brand-new way.



- Day 2 -

CLUBHOUSE VS. LIGHTHOUSE

Belonging is crucial to living. It's why our ancestors formed tribes. Food, water, and safety were only guaranteed in a group, and people couldn't survive alone. Although our physical needs are met differently today, we've held onto this tribal mindset. It's evolved into social clubs, fitting into a certain economic status, having a social media platform, having a certain degree. We have all kinds of measures to dictate who is in and who is out.

We all know what it's like to feel rejected from those social constructs. Rejection makes us feel as if we are not enough—not attractive enough, smart enough, rich enough, *something* enough. Perhaps knowing the sting of rejection makes getting into the “club” feel that much better. The exclusive group, job, or friend selects you, and you jump in without considering those who are left behind. Finally, you belong somewhere, and you cling to it like your life depends on it. Because, in a way, like it did for our ancestors, it does.

This is why Jesus' approach to the clubhouse is so radical. He dismantled it and exposed it for what it was: a way to reject others in order to feel better about ourselves. Jesus doesn't want us to build clubhouses. He wants us to be a lighthouse. Clubhouses have secret doors and entryways. Lighthouses shine bright for all to see. Clubhouses allow you to enter if you're polished, cleaned up, and put together. Lighthouses are there for those who are in distress, tossed by the waves, and need a safe place to anchor.

Clubhouses reject and select. Lighthouses draw in and welcome anyone who sees them. They point people to the ultimate light and ultimate source of belonging: Jesus Christ.

READ | Matthew 5:14–16

REFLECT

Jesus preached these words in the Sermon on the Mount. In the verses before, he listed the type of people who are blessed: “Blessed are the poor in spirit . . . blessed

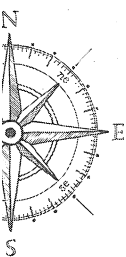
are the peacemakers . . . blessed are those who are persecuted” (verses 3, 9, 10). Knowing this, what type of person does Jesus say is the light of the world? How does this differ from the type of people we tend to elevate today?

2. According to verse 16, what is the ultimate goal for showing our light?

3. How has someone been a lighthouse for you—shown you the way to Jesus and made you feel like you belong?

4. How could you be a lighthouse for those around you?

PRAY | In your prayer time today, thank God for the lights in your life that have shown you the way. Ask him how you could be a light to others.



- Day 3 -

GRACE ALONE VS. GRACE-A-LOT

This week, you read about the Council at Jerusalem (see Acts 15). This council was called because certain Jewish believers were stating that Gentile believers needed to be circumcised (and follow other Jewish religious practices) in order to be considered part of the church. The thinking was that Gentiles who converted to Judaism did so through circumcision and baptism—so why wouldn't it be the same for Gentiles converting to Christianity?²⁶

At the time, Christianity was considered a *sect* of Judaism, since it was started by a Jew (Jesus) and first followed by Jews (the disciples and early believers). It was not the world religion that it is today. So you can't blame these Jewish believers for their mindset and requirements. They were simply following the law as they understood it. (And during this time, a stricter school of Pharisees known as the Shammai were in power, so it could be this type of strict, law-abiding leadership was trickling down and affecting early Christians.²⁷)

The church was employing a grace-a-lot mindset. They were saying that grace will get you *most* of the way there, but you must be circumcised or baptized or _____ (fill in the blank) to get the rest of the way there. Such a mindset is still alive today—in our churches and in our own hearts. The free nature of grace is still hard for us to believe!

The grace alone mindset was as counter to Jewish thinking back in Jesus' day and it is counter to our thinking today. Even when you've accepted him as your Savior, it is tempting to want to pick up the other oar and start paddling to get yourself the rest of the way. But grace alone tells you to put the oar down. Let grace alone do the work and take you home.

READ | Ephesians 2:1–9

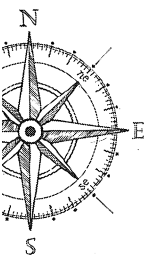
REFLECT

Considering the context you've just read, it's understandable that Paul would need to preach the message of the gospel plainly and directly to new Christian believers.

This is what he was doing in this passage that he wrote to the church in Ephesus. According to Paul's words in verse 4, why did God make us alive with Christ?

2. Paul lays out our condition before we encounter Christ—we are “dead in [our] transgressions and sins” (verse 1), “disobedient” (verse 2), and “deserving of [God's] wrath” (verse 3). But instead of condemning us to eternal judgment, God gives us new life in Christ. According to verses 8–9, how do we get this grace from God?
3. When it comes to the gospel and grace, what is difficult for you to believe? Why?
4. If you were to put down your “oar” today and fully embrace the grace alone mindset, what would change? How would *you* change? How would your life look different?

PRAY | For your prayer time today, meditate on Ephesians 2:4–9. Read them several times silently or aloud. See what sticks out to you. What new truth is God revealing to you today?



- Day 4 -

YOU VS. YOURSELF

As you enter this final personal study, you may be reflecting on the previous days' studies—on your clubs and your “Gentiles” and your attempts to take grace into your own hands. You may be realizing your subconscious tendency to think of some people as “unclean” and yourself as “clean.” Or you may be lamenting others' treatment of you as such.

Your grace-a-lot tendencies and habits of forming into exclusive clubs are more a reflection of how you feel about yourself than how you feel about others. It is hard to accept others when you haven't accepted yourself. It is hard to accept grace when you don't think you deserve it. But if it's true that Jesus accepts everyone—that there “is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female” (Galatians 3:28)—then it's true that Christ accepts the most difficult person for you to accept: *you*.

This internal hesitancy can prevent you from becoming the lighthouse to the world that God desires you to be. This reluctance toward self-acceptance can make grace impossible for you to accept. So, how do you confront yourself and accept what you see? *Choose to see what Christ sees instead.* Believe the truth about who he says you are.

It's true what they say: *you are your own worst enemy.* This is especially true when it comes to having grace for yourself and, therefore, being able to extend grace to others. If you are to be a lighthouse, pointing others to Jesus, you must first believe in the light that is in you, or else you will do what Scripture warns against and hide it (see Matthew 5:14). Self-acceptance isn't just about *you*. It's about how you treat others and how others will see Jesus through you. So believe what he has said about you to be true, accept the free gift of grace he is extending to you, and be transformed in the way you feel about yourself and others.

READ | Jeremiah 31:3, Romans 8:15, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Colossians 2:10, and 1 Peter 2:9

REFLECT

1. These verses are a mix of God speaking to the Israelites and the New Testament writers speaking to the members of the early church.²⁸ Although they are from different

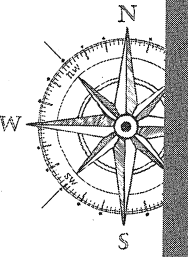
time periods, they share a common theme. According to these verses, how does God feel about you?

2. Who are you in Christ? List every description that you see in these verses.

3. What parts of you are hard to accept? How might this be holding you back from receiving God's grace and extending that grace to others?

4. Which of these verses do you most need to believe today? Why?

PRAY | As you close your time in prayer, reserve a few minutes to simply sit in Jesus' presence. Listen for his voice. Ask him to help you see who you are in him and how much he loves you.



- Days -

WRAP IT UP

Use this time to complete any study and reflection questions from previous days this week that you weren't able to finish. Make note of any revelations you've had and reflect on any growth or personal insights you've gained. Finally, discuss with your group what studies you might want to go through next and when you will next meet together.