

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

Ephesians 4:17-24

In verses 17-19 Paul offers a description of life without God. “Gentiles”, as a category, should be understood as more than a racial or cultural classification, but rather as those lacking the knowledge of, and revelation from, God. Notice the rather bleak description Paul uses...

- futility in their thinking
 - darkened in their understanding
 - ignorance
 - hardening of their hearts
 - lost all sensitivity
 - given themselves over to sensuality (a good way of understanding this is a lack of restraint)
 - indulging in every kind of impurity...with a continual lust for more (because it is not able to fulfill what is hoped for, combined with the law of diminished returns).
- (NIV)

In verses 20-24 Paul contrasts their former way of life with what life “in Christ” is like. The former way of life was ruled by “deceitful desires”. “Deceitful” because they are full of false promises. Humans were not made to live with unrestrained desires. Nor would having all our desires met actually be good for us. But therein lies the Lie that our world propagates and perpetuates—that life is about getting everything we want (or at least to the highest degree we can).

But Jesus has taught us that life is about something different. Paul reminds his readers that they “...were taught in Him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.” (verse 21 NIV) We can understand that as a summary statement of everything Paul covered in chapters 1-3, as well as referring to previous teaching he had given them somewhere along the line. Or, another way we could state that is previously they did not have revelation from God, but now, through the preaching of the Gospel about Jesus and His Kingdom, they now have revelation from God. This results in being “made new in the attitude of their minds...and a new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness”. (verse 23-24 NIV)

The exciting thing to see in all this is that CHANGE is possible...not only is it possible, it is expected. (We could even say that if no change results, there might be reason to believe that Jesus hasn’t been grasped properly.)

This begs the question, “How do we change?” Prior to answering that question, we need to understand how we are formed in the first place. There are 3 primary factors/influences that form every human:

- Who we associate with (Or, who we are connected to)
- Our understanding of reality (Or, what we think and believe...which is usually picked up along the way from those we associate with and the various stories/narratives that permeate our culture/society)

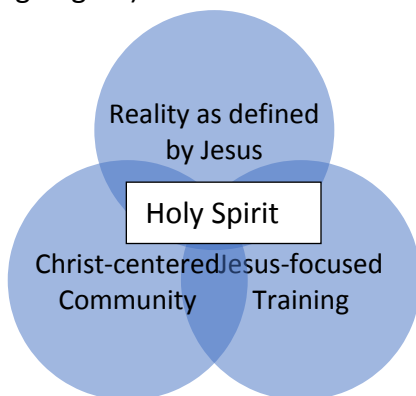
-The activities, practices, habits we regularly do (often learned from those we associate with; and that either shape our understanding of reality or are a reaction to our understanding of reality.)

Due to the fact that these 3 factors/influences are fluid, we can accurately say that as humans we are in a constant state of “becoming”...which begs the question who/what are we becoming? In order to change/transform, or be more proactive in the becoming process, we simply need to change these 3 factors/influences. (I say “simply” only conceptually...like many things, it’s easier said than done.)



So, when Paul says something like “*put off your old self*” (verse 22) and “*put on the new self*” (verse 24) he is inviting his readers to consider those 3 factors/influences “*in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.*” (verse 21)

Jesus did not come to start a religion but to tell us about reality and how to live in harmony with that reality. He called that reality the Kingdom of God. Everything Jesus did and taught as to demonstrate/prove that reality and how to live properly in it. So, as we analyze the 3 factors/influences we see that as we engage in Christ-centered community, embrace reality as defined by Jesus, and participate in Jesus-focused activities, change happens. What kind of change? We become more like Jesus...which is the goal. As Paul stated, we are “*created to be like God*” (verse 24). Though we are not left to make all this change happen by ourselves (in fact, under our own power we really can’t affect that much change). But like all of life, it is meant to be done in partnership with God...so He empowers us with His Spirit (the ultimate change-agent).



As we look at the letter to the Ephesians as a whole, we can see how Paul addresses each of these 3 factors/influences. In chapters 1-3 Paul goes to great length to describe reality as defined by Jesus, and he speaks to some degree about the Christ-centered community that results. In the first part of chapter 4 Paul really dives into the importance of Christ-centered community. In the rest of the letter, Paul will lay out for us what areas (activities, practices, habits) we need to pay attention to, and give energy toward, so we can grow/mature.

To elaborate a bit on “Jesus-focused training” (or activities, practices, habits that are aimed at becoming more like Jesus), a good way of thinking about it might be: in order to become like Jesus, we need to spend time with Jesus. The classic/traditional “spiritual disciplines” are time-tested and good places to start. But really, whatever helps us to become aware of His Presence, His love for us, and His will for us are good things to do. And ideally/hopefully these aren’t compartmentalized activities but are part of the natural ebb and flow of our lives. And, if a particular practice gets stale, or more of a burden than a blessing, experiment with something else. Be with Jesus with a heart of be real with Him and with a willing attitude to obey/follow Him...He’ll do the rest. But remember, change takes time, so be patient. Also, try to lower any preconceived ideas/expectations of what spending time with Jesus is supposed to “feel” like. If your experience isn’t the same as somebody else’s, that’s OK...you’re not them.

- Q. Think about your “old self” (prior to knowing Jesus) and your “new self” (since knowing Jesus). What are some specific differences you can identify?**
- Q. What are you doing to become more like Jesus?**
- Q. How are you different today (how have you grown, how are you more like Jesus) compared to a year ago? Two years ago? Five years ago? Ten years ago?**
- Q. As you step back and try to analyze our culture/society, who or what attempts to define reality? How so?**
- Q. When you spend time with Jesus, what is usually entailed? Describe how you learned that?**
- Q. Share how spending time with Jesus has evolved for you over the years.**
- Q. Describe the impact that Christ-centered community has had on you.**
- Q. As you consider who you are, describe how the 3 factors/influences have shaped/formed you into who you are.**
- Q. What do you think/feel Jesus is presently inviting you into/toward?**