

Small Group Guide: Dead Men Rescued by Grace

Ephesians 2:1-10 | The Prison Epistles Week 4

OPENING PRAYER & ICEBREAKER

Icebreaker Question:

Have you ever experienced a moment when you felt completely helpless and someone came to your rescue? What was that like?

SERMON RECAP

Paul paints a vivid before-and-after picture of salvation in three scenes:

1. **Dead in the Grave** (vv. 1-3) - Our condition before Christ
2. **Mercy That Brings Us to Life** (vv. 4-7) - God's intervention
3. **The Masterpiece Paul Calls Grace** (vv. 8-10) - Our new identity and purpose

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. **We were spiritually dead, not simply damaged.** Apart from Christ, we were corpses—physically alive but spiritually lifeless, following the patterns of this world and Satan himself.

2. **We were rescued by mercy as a demonstration of God's grace.** The phrase "But God..." changes everything. God's mercy doesn't just improve our life—it replaces death with resurrection life.

3. **We were recreated for His glory and destined to work with divine purpose.** We are God's masterpiece (poiema), His artwork, created anew with good works prepared in advance for us to walk in.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Understanding Our "Before" Picture (vv. 1-3)

1. Paul uses the word "dead" (nekros) to describe our spiritual condition before Christ. Why do you think he uses such a strong word rather than something softer like "sick" or "weak"?

2. The sermon mentioned that sin blinds us to danger, like buzzards feeding on roadkill, oblivious to approaching cars. Can you think of examples in our culture where people are "spiritually oblivious" to the consequences of sin?

3. Verse 3 says we were "by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." How does understanding this level our playing field with others? How should this affect the way we view people far from God?

Experiencing the "But God" Moment (vv. 4-7)

4. The sermon emphasized that "But God..." are two of the richest words in Scripture. Share about your own "But God" moment—when did God's mercy interrupt your story?

5. Paul says God "made us alive" (zōopoieō) with Christ. This is resurrection language, not renovation language. What's the difference between God renovating your old life versus resurrecting you to a completely new one?

6. The drowning illustration showed someone too weak to save themselves. Why is it important to understand that we couldn't contribute anything to our own salvation? How does this affect our relationship with God?

Living as God's Masterpiece (vv. 8-10)

7. Ephesians 2:8-9 is one of the clearest statements of salvation by grace alone. Why do you think people still struggle with trying to earn God's favor through good works?

8. The sermon mentioned that two generations have been taught that "being better equals being righteous." How have you seen this false gospel affect people's understanding of salvation?

9. Verse 10 says we are God's "workmanship" (poiema—His poem, His artwork). How does viewing yourself as God's masterpiece change the way you see yourself? Your purpose?

10. Paul says God prepared good works "in advance" for us to do. Have you ever sensed that God had prepared a specific act of service or kindness for you to do? What was that experience like?

GOING DEEPER

11. The sermon stated: "We need to be a church that says, 'It's not OK to stay where you are.'" How do we balance speaking truth about sin with extending grace and love? What does this look like practically?

12. Read James 2:14-26. How do we reconcile "faith without works is dead" with "salvation is not a reward for good things we have done"? What's the relationship between grace and works?

13. The pastor mentioned that many people doubt whether God's grace applies to them. Who in your life needs to hear that God's mercy is for the undeserving? How can you share this truth with them this week?

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

This Week's Challenge: Choose at least one action to take

REFLECT:

- Spend time journaling your own "before and after" story. Write out what your life was like before Christ (or before you truly surrendered to Him) and what He has done since. Thank God specifically for His mercy.

REACH OUT:

- Identify one person in your life who is "physically alive but spiritually dead." Pray for them daily this week and look for an opportunity to share the hope of the Gospel with them.

REMEMBER:

- Memorize Ephesians 2:8-9. Write it on a card and place it where you'll see it daily. When you're tempted to earn God's favor through performance, remind yourself that salvation is a gift.

RESPOND:

- Ask God to show you one "good work" He prepared in advance for you to do this week. It might be serving someone, encouraging someone, or meeting a practical need. Then do it, recognizing you're fulfilling your purpose as God's masterpiece.

****RETHINK:****

- Examine your life for areas where you've been trying to earn God's approval. Confess this to God and receive His grace afresh. Share with your group how you're learning to rest in grace rather than strive in performance.

CLOSING REFLECTION

Read Ephesians 2:1-10 aloud together one more time as a group.

****Reflection Question:****

Which of the three scenes resonates most with you right now?

- Dead in the Grave
- Mercy That Brings Us to Life
- The Masterpiece Paul Calls Grace

Why does that particular scene speak to you today?

PRAYER PROMPTS

Close your time together by praying for:

1. ****Gratitude**** - Thank God for His mercy and grace that rescued us from spiritual death
2. ****Humility**** - Confess any ways we've tried to earn salvation or God's favor through our own efforts
3. ****Compassion**** - Pray for specific people you know who are spiritually dead and need to hear the Gospel
4. ****Purpose**** - Ask God to reveal the good works He has prepared for each person in your group
5. ****Boldness**** - Pray for courage to share the message that God's grace is for the undeserving

PREPARATION FOR NEXT WEEK

Read Ephesians 2:11-22 in preparation for next week's discussion on how God breaks down dividing walls and creates one new humanity in Christ.

Memory Verse:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." - Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)