

WARM-UP

- Describe your first day at a new school, job, or organization.
- Have you had a first impression of something that turned out very differently?
- What would you tell yourself of four years ago regarding belongingness?

WORD *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* **GALATIANS 3:28**

In Christ, we are one. The church, however, must be marked by this acceptance. For the early church, this Scripture notes the main discriminations of the time: Jews and Greeks, slaves and free. We too still have these discriminations within society. But as believers, we have grace from God for both belonging to the Body of Christ and accepting others in the same Body. We can further understand this by looking into the experience of Paul.

1 | Grace to Belong

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

Ephesians reminds us that we have been saved *by grace through faith*. The only way we can join in the assembly of God is because of His grace, because He saved us from our sins. God gives us the great grace to belong to His family. How have you become involved in church community since you became a Christian? What good friends have you made through church community?

2 | Grace to Accept

*²⁶And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. ²⁷But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. **ACTS 9:26,27***

Though Paul immediately began to preach the gospel, the believers were suspicious of him. He was already fixed in the minds of the people as a persecutor of the believers. We are saved not by our own doing, but by grace. Because of this, we too must show acceptance to others. We cannot let the knowledge of who they were or what they'd done cause us to treat them differently, like the believers who didn't believe Paul. How have you shown God's love and acceptance to others in the church?

APPLICATION

- Do you feel that you belong to the body of Christ? Pray for His grace of salvation today. Thank Him for His unconditional love for you.
- Have you experienced not being accepted by others in the church? Pray for the perspective of God on this situation. Ask God to help you forgive those who have hurt you.
- Think of one person who you know that does not yet know Christ. Pray for this person to understand God's grace of belonging in His family.

