



**Thanks for checking out our sermon-based Study Guides!** If you've never used our Study Guides before, you'll find some basic instructions at the end of page 2.

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**SERMON-BASED STUDY GUIDE**  
for the sermon preached on May 16, 2021  
Finding Our Way Forward Week 5 - "How Welcoming Am I?" - Acts 11:19-25



Here at Week 5 of our series *Finding Our Way Forward*, we ask the question, "How Welcoming Am I?" It's a question that ought to give us pause because upon reflection, most people are somewhat welcoming but the question is how welcoming are you? And the second question to consider might be, "In the way of Jesus, am I welcoming enough?" We are not the only Christ-followers to have wrestled with this question. In fact, the early Christians did as well and here in this study, we want to see what welcoming others looked like then and what we can learn today.

**Group Discussion Questions**

Q -- Pastor Jon opened the message with a humorous story of being at Game 7 of the 2007 ALCS Game at Fenway where he and the Fenway faithful booed the Cleveland Indians sitting in front of them. Even though sports culture has its own way of cheering and booing, Jon felt both startled by his participation and some remorse. Can you describe a time when you didn't feel welcomed? And is there a time where you found yourself struggling to be welcoming to someone or a set of others?

Q – In Acts 11, readers need to appreciate the heavy persecution that Jewish followers of Jesus are facing, and the identity crisis they are experiencing when it comes to including Gentiles (those of non-Jewish ethnicity) to this new "way." Between physical threat that has led to them

moving cities, ethnic inclusion of Gentiles and profound theological implications, everything they know is dramatically changing. Pause for a moment here and reflect on what made these changes so challenging? If you were here 2000 years ago, which of these would have been most difficult for you?

Q – Jon made the case that to welcome without limitations is to confront our selfishness and our fears and warned us of the consequences of tribalism by explaining it like this:

“But when we begin to fear people who are different than us with different perspectives, that can easily and dangerously lead us to tribalism. Tribalism is the behavior and attitude that stems from the belief that the only important success is the success of my tribe or my social group. There is great beauty in a shared, collective identity. But when our fears turn into tribalism, we think that no one else outside my social group, ethnic group, or Facebook group, is worthy of me going out of my way to welcome and receive. Or we say, if someone wants my welcome, they need to change how they behave and think to match how I behave and think. But tribalism keeps us from discovering and enjoying the vision that God has for his people. It keeps us from welcoming people who might look, pray, or worship differently than the people we’re used to seeing -- people from different socioeconomic statuses, people from different cultures, people with different but equally important perspectives.”

Why is tribalism so detrimental to the flourishing of the church? And to whom do the teachings of Jesus confront tribalistic mentalities?

(Leader Note: If your group needs help, consider reading Mark 12:28-31 and Matthew 5:43-48.)

Q – Read Acts 11:20-21. How did these early Jewish Christians respond to these dramatic paradigm shifts and what can this example of radical inclusion teach us today? Consider how their way of welcoming radically altered the trajectory of the church and let’s ask ourselves what we might learn from that today?

### **Prayer Suggestion**

As we close in prayer today, let’s reflect on the quote by Esau McCaulley that was shared later in the sermon and invite the Holy Spirit to confront any of our selfishness and our fears, and to place increasing value on being a welcoming and diverse Christ-like community:

“God’s vision for his people is not for the elimination of ethnicity to form a colorblind uniformity of sanctified blandness. Instead God sees the creation of a community of different cultures united by faith in his Son as a manifestation of the expansive nature of his grace.”

- Esau McCaulley

**How to Use These Study Guides:**

- Consider sending out the Scripture passage to your group members ahead of time.
- Begin each meeting with a short time of checking in with one another.
- You may want to begin the discussion by reading the Scripture passage together out loud, or by summarizing the passage if everyone has read it ahead of time.
- Don't feel like you need to discuss every question included in the Study Guide. Pick one or two to start with, and see how the conversation flows.
- If your group meets over Zoom:
  - You may need to do more overt facilitating over Zoom than you would in person. Feel free to call on people to invite them to share.
  - Try to be sensitive to attention spans over Zoom—keep the meetings shorter than they would be in person.
- Be sure to set aside time for sharing prayer requests and praying together.

**Group Leader Support:** Please reach out to your Campus Pastor or your Coach if you have any questions about leading your group or concerns about your group dynamic. If you have questions about or feedback on the Study Guides, please reach out to Pastor Tim or Pastor Rachel from the Group Life team.