

Do you know what I'm going to do? We're not going to mess around this morning. We've got so much to get to and I'm so looking forward to it. No opening story, no little small talk. We're going to dive right into Ephesians 2:11-14 in our ongoing study of the book of Ephesians: The Truth, the Way, the Life. It is the truth about our salvation, chapters 1, 2, and 3. It is the way we are to live, chapters 4, 5, and 6. All of that when married leading to the life that God intended for you and I. So I know you just did this, but I'm going to have you do it again in honor of God's word would you grab your Bibles and would you stand and let me read this to you this morning. Ephesians 2:11-14. It says, "Therefore," and what does therefore mean? Whenever you see "therefore" its always pointing you back to what we just talked about, how we were dead in our trespasses and sins, how prior to redemption we walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, and how we were sons of disobedience and we were lost in our lust and our flesh, but God in His great love and mercy made us alive together with Christ. Amen. Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision." Look at that. You, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision." They were already calling each other names, way back then. We're going to talk about that this morning. The "Uncircumcision" and the "Circumcision" calling each other names. Circumcision which is performed in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ...it reminds of chapter 2, verse 4, But God...But now, verse 13, in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups, the ones over here and the ones over there, both groups, He did, into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall. Father God, our prayer this morning as we come back to Ephesians is that we could understand and see clearly even though we make that difficult at times. But God I pray this morning that Your Spirit and Your Word would supersede any distractions that we would bring or that the enemy would attempt to bring. And God that Your Word and Your Spirit would bring truth and great clarity and conviction and power to each of us. We want to understand, God, this picture of unity. We want to understand this picture of unity. We want to understand this picture of walls and barriers being broken and done away with. God we want to understand how it is that You want the body of Christ to live and to think and to function. We get insights into that here in this passage today. So God grow us and teach us. Help us to be the people You called us to be. In Your Son's name, we pray. Amen. You can be seated. I think you'll see this on the screen. I think you'll see it there at the top of your note sheet. I want you to take note of this my friends. As human beings who have been tainted and scarred by sin, we build barriers. As human beings who have been tainted and scarred by sin, we build barriers. As walk according to the course of this world, as we walk according to the prince of the power of the air, as we walk as sons of disobedience, what happens is in time we separate from others for all kind of reasons. We build these walls. Often times, erected with the mortar of hate and pride using bricks of intolerance and superiority and distain. I'm going to tell you this in a number of different ways and a number of different times this morning. So I hope you'll catch this. It's what our iniquity produces. It is the result of our iniquity. It's what our iniquity produces and it's been that way from the very beginning. Track with me if you would. Abel's offering in Genesis chapter 4. Abel's offering to God in Genesis 4 was different than the offering that Cain brought and God seemed to like Abel's better. We don't know exactly why God liked Abel's better. My guess is that it probably had something to do with the heart with which the gifts were given but the fact is Abel brought an offering, his was different than Cain's. God liked Abel's offering better and Cain didn't like it that God didn't like his. And he certainly didn't like his brother because his brother's offering seemed to be deemed better by God. So in Cain's intolerance and in Cain's distain, the text says his countenance falls, his anger rises, and he whacks him. He

kills him. Cain murders Abel. You see it there on the screen in Genesis 4:8, And it came about when they were in the field that Cain rose up against Abel, his brother, and killed him. Now it's the first murder ever recorded in scripture yes but it's also the first "I don't like you." It's pretty obvious. Huh? It's the first "I'm superior to you." It's the first "You bother me and I'll do anything to keep you down. I'm up here. You're down there." It's the first recorded case of severe disunity. You say, wow, he killed him. Yea, he did. You say, where did that come from? Let me remind you again, my friends, sin and iniquity. Remember what we've learned about sin in recent days and what sin fundamentally produces. You can write this down. I hope you will. It will be on the screen. Sin, my friends, always has, and it's doing it today, and it always will. Sin separates what was close and intimate in the presence of sin won't be close and intimate any longer. Sin separates. Sin alienates those who were close are not longer intimate. Those who were friends that friendship gets broken. Those who used to be together are not longer together. They are divided. Sin separates. Sin alienates. Sin segregates. "I don't want to be with you anymore. You don't want to be with me anymore. We don't want to be with them. We don't want to be with them." Sin separates. Sin alienates. Sin segregates. It always has and eventually it terminates. It separates. Alienates. Segregates. And terminates. Imagine how good that would have sounded if I was a black preacher. Seriously. It would have sounded so much better. But it's the truth, isn't it? I tell you what, you can say yea it is the truth, Amen. Maybe we should just stop for a moment and you should just think about, just so you're sure, maybe you should just think about your sin and a relationship, let's say. Let's think about your sin and a relationship with your family. You sin and relationship with one that you love. Let's think about your sin and those at work. Think about some sin. We don't want to think about it a lot, I know, but just think about some sin that you've chosen, a sinful pattern or attitude that you've held onto and think about what it did. Go ahead. You can just in your mind, you can play it out. It separates, doesn't it? It alienates. It creates space where there didn't used to be and God never wanted there to be. It separates and it alienates. It segregates and left unchecked, it what? Terminates. It kills us. Kills you, kills me. Here's the point, separation and the termination that eventually comes with sin was never God's heart or ever God's design. In fact, His first plan to remedy the separation sin had caused was absolutely brilliant. Remember the plan? We see it just played out and unfolding in the pages of the Old Testament. He named the nation of Israel, the Jewish people, His chosen people. Remember this? Genesis 12. God designates that they will be His chosen, favored people. He does set them apart from the other nations, that's true. But not for separation sake, no, not for the purpose of exclusion, but to the contrary, He sets them apart for eventually the purpose of inclusion. God wanted Israel to be so unique and holy in their set-apartness that the nations would be redemptively drawn to God through Israel's restorative reconciling love. You see, in God's design, it's always been about the different, the detached, and the distant being drawn to Him and becoming one. From the beginning it has always been that way with God. The distant and the detached being drawn together to become one. This was God's heart. This was God's plan. He wanted to use Israel to accomplish this. Go to Isaiah; come on let me hear your pages turn. Go in your Old Testament back to Isaiah 42. Come on turn those pages. Isaiah 42 and I want to show you in a couple of verses; we could look at 50. But let me just show you a couple verses where we see God's heart and how He wanted to use Israel to break down the barrier, to get rid of the walls, to reach the nations. Isaiah 42:6. He says "I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, and I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations, to open blind eyes." This is what God wanted them to do to help Him open blind eyes. "To bring out prisoners from the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness from the prison." Flip over a few pages to Isaiah 49, more of God's heart for the nations through his blessed people Israel. It says in Isaiah 49:36, He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel." That's a good thing but that's too small a thing. "I

will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation, [the God of the Bible's salvation] may reach to the end of the earth." That's what God wanted. That's what God has wanted from the beginning that His salvation would reach to the ends of the earth that the nations would be reached by His people whom He had chosen. That was what He desired but Israel, as most of you know in the room, Israel didn't cooperate real well. No, Israel refused to be faithful to this endeavor. They toyed and they tinkered with the other nations' gods. They were infatuated with Baal. They partied at the asherah poles. They slept with their women and they reneged again, and again, and again. They'd come back to God and beg Him for forgiveness; He'd grant them forgiveness and another opportunity to reach the nations through their distinct and holy living and love for Him, and again and again and again, they reneged again and again and again they fell short again and again, they said "no, we don't want to do that. It's not who we want to be. It's not how we want to live." I could take you to a number of places where you would see this. Maybe one of the most powerful places where you can see this is the story of Jonah. Turn in your Bibles to Jonah chapter 4, if you would. It's an amazing description of a hard and bitter heart. Jonah had been called by God to go and reach the people of Nineveh. Many of you know that. God wanted the Gentiles, the folks who weren't Jews in Nineveh, to hear about Him. They wanted the message to be proclaimed. [I beat half of you in the room to Jonah; I just wanted you to know that.] God wants the people of Nineveh to be reached and calls on our Jewish brother Jonah and says I want you to go reach them. Jonah says I don't want to go reach them, hops on a ship, and he tries to run, and the ship hits bad waters because this disobedient Israelite is on it and the waves get big and the guys figure it out and he gets tossed over. And the big fish comes and swallows him up and he's in the belly of the whale and he says, God I'm sorry, OK, I give, I'll go. God has the fish burp him up, he gets out, he goes to Nineveh. He's still not happy about it. He declares the truth in Nineveh. I won't read it all to you, but the end of 3, if you start at about verse 5, "then the people of Nineveh believed in God." How great is that. The entire city and "they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them." They whole city comes to faith in God and you want to know how deep the hatred between Jews and Gentiles was, do you want to see how far it ran in their blood and in their bones and in their minds, look at Jonah. Jonah 4:1-3, "But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became," what? Angry. Why? Because they all came to faith in God and he hated it. Look what he says. It's so sad; it's not funny but it's almost funny. He prayed to the Lord. This is like a prayer; it's not like a really bad prayer but he prays to the Lord, he said, "Please Lord, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity. Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life" if life means Nineveh comes to faith in You because I hate them. They didn't like each other. It ran deep and that stiff-necked, stubborn unrelenting selfishness ran all the way through this Old Testament drama as it unfolded. You know what, as we come to the New Testament, we fast-forward to Ephesus and the pagan Greek culture of this day, the day of study in the book at Ephesus, it's still going on. The Jew-Gentile thing still going on but now my friends, there's separation and there's segregation and there's alienation everywhere. In New Testament times, one of the greatest barriers, one of the greatest walls that had been established was between, listen, slaves and their owners. That's right. Those who were free looked down on slaves as being inferior, slightly above animals. Many slaves looked on their masters with content, resentment, and hatred. Consequently, one of the greatest problems of the early church, some of you don't even think about this and you wouldn't even have imagined that this was actually an issue, but when you play it all out it was. One of the greatest problems of the early church was getting Christian slave owners and Christian slaves to treat each other as spiritual equals. You talk about division, talk about walls. Women were also looked down upon. There was a divide, a chasm between men and women. Women

were also looked down on as inferior beings. Husbands often treated their wives little better than they did their animals or their slaves. When a wife became a Christian, imagine this, her entire life, outlook, and value system changed and an unbelieving husband would likely divorce her simply because she had made such a radical decision without his consent. Separation everywhere. We see division and distance everywhere. The Greeks were so proud of their culture and supposed racial superiority that they considered everyone else to be barbarians. I believe to which Paul alludes in Romans 1 and Colossians 3. The great Roman statesman Cicero wrote: As the Greeks say, all men are divided into two classes, Greeks and barbarians. And Livy another ancient Roman wrote that Greeks constantly waged a truce-less war against people of other races, all of whom they held to be intolerable animals. And then you still had the Jews and the Greek. And you thought Jonah had a bad attitude? By this point in history, my friends, the divide, the chasm had grown even larger. The hatred was even deeper. It was a more bitter, ugly scene than ever before. One writer wrote, Jews hated Gentiles and while they as Jews were more than willing to accept God's blessing, they were still stiff-necked and unwilling to engage in His, what? His mission. It was God's mission and this at the crux of our passage this morning. This is really at the bottom of the truth that we're getting at here today. It's God's mission. It's what God now intended. It's what now God was unfolding that was becoming so unnerving and maddening to the Jews. I want you to see, every one of you, I want you to see this morning God's mission. I want you to see it clearly spelled out and Paul does that for us in Ephesians 3. Paul calls it the mystery of God. Have you ever heard it referred to as that? The mystery of God begins to be revealed here in the epistles. Paul the one really specifically ordained by God to be one who would deliver to the church the mystery that God was now revealing and from all of my seminary days and all of my years of study, I understand theologically why they call it the mystery. I do. But part of me always wondered why it was seen as such a mystery when from the very beginning God has always been about trying to break down those barriers and those walls. God has always been about restoring. He has always been about including. He has always tried to redeem. It's been his approach from day one. Look at the mystery. Ephesians 3:3-36. This is really, really big stuff, my friends. Here it is: "that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was [you see this hadn't been declared up until now] not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body [of Christ], and fellow partakers [now] of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." That, my friends, was enormous. This was mind boggling. Like I said, it was maddening to the Jews and again hopefully I've given it its due description and I hope you understand this morning as you read those words. And that you could take probably what would be probably in your lifetime and mine the most heated, the most deeply divisive, the most violent, the most awful, the ugliest confrontations that you and I have ever experienced or seen or watched on the news, when we talk about the racial clash between African-Americans and whites and civil rights and dogs biting and beatings and fire hoses and marches and assassinations, I mean in my lifetime it's one of the great conflicts in terms of racial divide and tensions and bigotry and all those kinds of issues coming together. It was explosive. Literally, it was nothing. I mean it was something but compared to this, there's some similarities there but this is right along those lines and even more intense. When God said from here on out, they're in, they meaning non-Jew, when He said to His people, you know what, from here on out, everybody who comes to me, everybody who bows the knee of their heart to me, we are going to give every one a shot. Everybody. That was for many a great day and for many a Jew, it was the end for them. It's important before we go any further this morning, it's really important, that everyone of understands the implication of this for them. I hope I've painted that picture for you, how difficult that was, how important it was though as well, for the church, for them. I hope every one of you

can understand how important this is for you and for me. As God continues to grow here at 7400 East State a diverse community of disciples, as He continues to in this neighborhood and in this community that He's given us the privilege of reaching into with a school and a church and a priesthood of believers. It means everybody, my friends. I'm so thankful that more and more so today that this is a home. I'm so thankful that more and more so today red, yellow, black, and white are finding this to be a place where they are welcomed and encouraged and met with open arms, where spiritual formation and our desire to see the church be all that it can be is something that we hope for and we wish for for everyone, no matter where you live, no matter how much money you make, no matter where you're going on vacation, no matter what kind of car you drive or don't drive, whether you take the bus, work in a factory, or downtown in a coat and tie. It just doesn't matter. I want to read to you some passages that this study leads us to. It really does. Go to Colossians. Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians. Go to Colossians 3. Let me just read this to you. Colossians 3:10. In 9 it says, "Don't lie to each other since you laid aside the old self." And 10 it says: "and having put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew." No distinction between circumcised and uncircumcised. No distinction between barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and Christ is in all. No more spiritual distinction. No more ethnic distinction. No more cultural distinction. All of that right there. Galatians 3. Go back just after 1st and 2nd Corinthians you'll come to Galatians. I want you to go to Galatians 3:27: "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." You've got different clothes on now and with that new wardrobe, with the different clothes that you now have in Christ. Verse 28: "there is neither Jew nor Greek." No more. There is neither slave nor free man. There is neither male nor female [he goes that far]; for you are all, what? Say it. One. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. I'm grateful for that and I can't wait for you and I to continue to grow in our willingness and readiness to embrace the opportunities God brings us. There are still some of us in the room, still a few of us in the room a little uncomfortable with the poor because what they want sometimes, because of how they look, because of how they smell. There's well-resourced people in this family still a little uncomfortable because sometimes it's hard for you to hear us say sell your possessions and give to the poor. God's doing a work in many of you when it comes to how tightly you hold onto what and how willing you are to give. And there's poor people in this place who have attitudes that need to be adjusted still; you're resentful of the well-resourced and wish they'd give you more. There's still those in the room on the ethnic front; we're making progress, but the thought of sharing not only a pew but a life with someone red, yellow, black or white, we've got to keep working on that. When I say we've got to keep working on that, the Spirit of God wants to keep working in you on that and you and I need to be receptive and willing because the scriptures teach us this morning that the barriers are gone, that the walls have been torn down, be it ethnic, social-economic, spiritual, past, history, no matter what you were addicted to, no matter how nicely you were raised, no matter how you look, smell, or where you live, we are all one. And God says that when we're one, then we experience His blessing and His power and I'm so thankful that He's moving us in that direction. Lastly, this morning I just have to show you this. It's all very related. I want to show you how far He brought the Gentiles. I want to show you this morning how separated and how alienated and how segregated they were. I want you to see in one swoop here how far He brought them. 1 through 3 in Ephesians, all about what God did in salvation. I can't wait for you to see it. It's a very graphic picture that gets painted and I want you to rejoice in what God did for non-Jews when the mystery was revealed and everybody got a chance to come, how far He brought them. Look with me back at our text. Ephesians 2:12: "remember that you were [Gentile] at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." Watch this, just kind of track down through those and write

them down on your note sheet there. They were without Christ. Just think about that just for a moment. Think about somebody being without Christ. No redeemer. No rescuer. No Savior. No Messiah. No forgiveness. No nothing. Lost and absolutely, utterly alone. They were without Jesus. As it says in the text, they were excluded from the commonwealth of Israel. They were excluded from Israel. You could even shorten that by just saying, because this is the notion behind that statement, they were excluded from the family of God. God had put His favor on, listen, the family of Israel. God had put His favor on the family of Israel. Paul uses this as an example. There were Gentiles who would not have known and many of you never knew what it was like to be part of family. God protected Israel. God has His hand on Israel. God blessed Israel. We're not talking about Uncle Guido; we're talking about God, the God of the universe had their back wherever they went. They had some troubles but God was for them. This what Paul said, you were excluded from the family of God; you weren't a part of that protection; you weren't a part of that blessing; you were without Christ; you were excluded from Israel; Gentiles were strangers to God's promises. Wow. Can you image not having any idea? Can you imagine not having ever experienced the promises of God? You say, what promises? Well just start thinking about it. Think of all that He's promised you. I started just writing them down this week. I will hold you up, Kelly, I will. I will keep you. I will not let you go. I will deliver you. I will never forsake you. I will always be with you. I will strengthen you. I will encourage you. I will envision you. They never ever understood or knew what it was like to have someone for them at that level, to make those kind of promises and fulfill them. They were without Christ. They were excluded from the family. They were strangers to promise. These last two are just horrible. They were hopeless. I'm so thankful that I get to know you and I'm so thankful that you share your lives and your stories with me. Some of you in this room are so hopeful because you're with Him. Amen. Do you understand and a lot of you do, do you understand what hopeless is? You could say it a lot of ways, hopeless is nothing works. Nothing. It's when nothing works. No where you turn. Nothing that you give yourself to. Nothing you chase after. Nothing ever works. It's always empty and you begin to see it and experience it more and more and more so in your life and everywhere you turn, and all the things you try, it doesn't work and you're left in the emptiness of your humanness. You're left in the darkness of your flesh. I've been there and many in this room have been there and it's hopeless and that's where they lived. That was the reality of their life. Then they were, it's hard to even say it. I mean it's just a little phrase but the more I thought about it and looked at all week, it's actually hard to say, without God. Can you imagine a godless existence? No God. The text says they were without God in the world. For them it was as if He wasn't even there. Without God. Because of His great mercy and the love with which He loved them, them being dead in their trespasses and sin, lost in their iniquity, made us alive together with who? With Christ. That is an amazing picture. I love how the section we're in here ends. "For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one." No more groups. No more divides. No more them and us. No more us over here; them over there. No more uncircumcision, circumcision, no more different colors of skin, no more different sizes of checkbooks. For He Himself is our peace and made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall. I want you to see something before we go. Korban would you come up here and we're going to close. Let me invite you not to go anywhere but let me show you something on the screen. How far away, how distant were the Gentiles? Let's just make sure this morning that we don't leave without this as personal and as real as it can be. How far away, how distant are you? I know some of you in the room this morning and I'm so thankful God has let me get to know you and I know you're thinking these things through. The fact of the matter is, and you know that we love you and you know that we respect you on your journey, but the fact is even though you've been thinking it through, this is you without Him. You don't get some of Him. You don't get some of the blessing. You don't get some of the benefits when you're sort of thinking it through. I just want you to be able to real honestly say to yourself that

without Him, you're without Christ, you're excluded from the family, you're strangers to God's promises, so don't claim Him, you're hopeless and nothing works and you are minus the bowing of the knee of your heart to Him, you're without God. We would never want that for you. So we would just give you a chance this morning. Whoever you are, whatever your road has been like, wherever you have traveled, maybe today is the opportunity God has provided for you to fully surrender your heart and life to Him, to become part of the body of Christ. It's quite a body. It's a diverse piece of work. It's a diverse piece of art. It's a workmanship we learned last week created by Him for us all to do good things. So come and join Him. You can just pray to Him. You can say these words to Him this morning. Bow your heads right now, all of you. If God is moving in your heart this morning, just cry out to Him. You can just cry out in words like this, O God, I know that I am a sinner and I know God my sin has separated me from you. It has alienated me. I am without Your Son. I am excluded from a family I would love to be a part of. I'm a stranger to Your promises and I don't want to be. I am hopeless. It's not working. I need Your help and I'm without You. You can just say this to Him, O God, please forgive me because of what You did on the cross, I know You can forgive me all of my sins and welcome me into Your family today. I can be with Christ. I can be a participate in Your promises. I can have hope and I can be with You. If you are praying those kinds of words this morning, know that He hears you and He's forgiven your sins and He has redeemed you. God, welcome those whose hearts are broken this morning into Your family, a life changing, eternity altering, commitment. O God, may you give us the privilege to know them in the days to come. May they communicate with a good and trusted friend. May they shoot us an email tomorrow. May they come down front at the end of the service and let us celebrate in their new life and new decision. Most importantly, God, may we function with them as part of this body in way that would honor you without barriers and without walls. May we be a loving, diverse community of disciples willing to go across the street, across the cubicle, across the world to pass along your attributes to others. Thank you for this time this morning. Thank you for the great truth of Ephesians 2. Bring us back together again next week if that be Your will. Everybody in the room agreed and said. Amen.