

You're A Winner

Connect Group Guide - 4.19.26

Opening Prayer

Ice Breaker

Question: Share about a time when you felt like a "winner" - whether in sports, academics, work, or another area of life. How did that feel?

Key Scripture

• Ephesians 1:1-14

Message Recap

This message walks through Ephesians 1:1-14 and reminds us of who we truly are in Christ. While our physical birth is a miracle, it's our spiritual birth that changes everything. In Christ, we are justified, regenerated, reconciled, propitiated, and sanctified—completely made new and brought into right relationship with God. The powerful truth is this: God is not mad at us. His wrath was fully satisfied through Jesus, and what we experience now is the loving discipline of a Father, not the punishment of a judge. This shifts our mindset from trying to earn God's approval to living from the approval we already have, and challenges us to truly believe it and let it transform how we live.

Key Takeaways

The Big Idea

When you surrender your life to Christ, five things happen instantly that define your new identity as a winner in God's eyes.

The Five Things That Happen When You're Born Again:

1. **Justification** - God declares you "not guilty" and credits Jesus' righteousness to your account
2. **Regeneration** - You become a completely new creation (not just improved, but brand new)

3. **Reconciliation** - Your relationship with God is fully restored
4. **Propitiation** - Jesus absorbed God's full wrath for your sin
5. **Sanctification** - God is actively shaping you to become more like Jesus (ongoing process)

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Message

1. Read Ephesians 1:3-14 together (in any translation). What phrases or words stand out to you? Why do you think Paul wrote this as one long, breathless sentence?
2. The message explained that justification is a courtroom term. How does viewing your salvation through the lens of a courtroom (where someone takes your place AND gives you their perfect record) impact your understanding of grace?

Going Deeper

3. Pastor Mike said, "You're not a better version of your old self. You're completely new." Why do we struggle to believe this? What keeps us identifying with our past instead of our new identity?
4. Discuss the difference between God's wrath (which Jesus took) and God's discipline (which we still experience). How does understanding this difference change your view of God when you sin?
5. The message emphasized that Christianity is about "relationship restoration" not "rule keeping." How would your daily walk with God look different if you truly lived from this perspective?
6. "The enemy wants you to remember who you were. God's trying to make you become who you are." Share an area where the enemy keeps reminding you of your past. How can the group pray for you to embrace your new identity instead?

Personal Reflection

7. Which of the five things (justification, regeneration, reconciliation, propitiation, sanctification) is hardest for you to believe about yourself? Why?

8. Pastor Mike asked: "What would happen if we really believed these things?" How would your life change this week if you fully embraced that you are:
- Justified (not guilty, credited with Christ's righteousness)
 - Regenerated (completely new)
 - Reconciled (God's friend, not distant)
 - Propitiated (punishment already paid)
 - Being sanctified (God is working on you)
9. The message mentioned that when we sin, we don't just "break a rule" - we "wound a relationship." How does this shift in thinking affect how you approach confession and repentance?

Practical Applications

This Week's Challenge

Apply each of these five truths to meditate on each day this week:

- **Monday:** I am justified - God declares me "not guilty"
- **Tuesday:** I am regenerated - I am a completely new creation
- **Wednesday:** I am reconciled - God is my Father and my friend
- **Thursday:** I am propitiated - Jesus took all God's wrath for my sin
- **Friday:** I am being sanctified - God is actively working in me

Daily Practice:

- Write the day's truth on a note card
- Read it aloud 3 times in the morning
- Journal about how believing this truth changes your perspective
- Share one insight with someone

Prayer Requests & Closing

Leader Notes

- Be sensitive to different perspectives on Israel; focus on biblical teaching rather than politics
- Encourage participation from everyone, but don't force anyone to share
- If someone wants to give their life to Christ during discussion, be prepared to pray with them
- Keep the discussion focused on personal application, not just theological debate
- Consider inviting someone knowledgeable about Israel or Jewish culture to a future meeting