

BIBLE
STUDIES
FOR LIFE.

SMALL GROUPS

WELCOME HOME

CONNECTING AND ENGAGING
PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH



MICHAEL KELLEY
& THOM S. RAINER

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Eric Geiger

Senior Vice President, LifeWay Christian Resources

Gena Rogers

Brian Gass

Content Editors

Michael Kelley

Director, Groups Ministry

Send questions/comments to: Content Editor, *Bible Studies for Life: Adults*, One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234; or make comments on the Web at BibleStudiesforLife.com.

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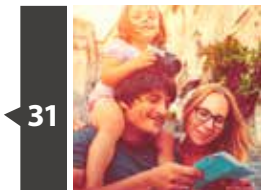
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Training



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There's no place like home.

The most powerful communication tools we have at our disposal are often not our words. Experts in communication consistently tell us that much of our communication is presented in a non-verbal way.

- ▶ The teenager who says, "Yes, Sir," yet rolls her eyes.
- ▶ The teacher who says he values interaction but lectures in a monotone voice without ever pausing for questions.
- ▶ The job candidate who claims confidence in her ability to do the job but fidgets in her seat with the only break being nervous laughter.

These people are all saying *something*, but what they are *communicating* is quite different from what they are saying.

What are we communicating to those who come to our church or Bible study group for the very first time? What are we *really* saying? We might be verbalizing words of welcome, but we might also be presenting a message that says just the opposite.

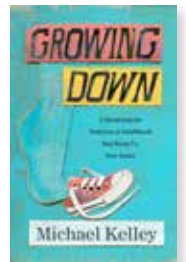
In this study, we will examine what we are *really* saying. We will look deeply into the posture and attitude that exemplifies the right kind of invitation. We will look at what we need to do so that, when we encounter those who are just beginning to come around to the truth of God and His church, they don't just hear, but also *feel* the same welcome God has given us in Christ.

"You are welcome. We're glad you are here."



Michael Kelley

Michael serves as the Director of Groups Ministry at LifeWay Christian Resources, and is the author of *Boring, Wednesdays Were Pretty Normal*, and recently released a new book, *Growing Down*.



Thom Rainer

Thom serves as president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources. He publishes a daily blog and twice weekly podcast at ThomRainer.com. This study complements his new book, *Becoming a Welcoming Church*.



1

REALITY CHECK



What makes a house feel like a home?

QUESTION #1

THE POINT

Our lives should serve as a welcome mat into the church.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

If you're like me, you could practically get home with your eyes closed. You've made the trip so many times you know it by heart: the bumps in the road, the places to turn, and even the way the sun shines through the trees.

So imagine one day you take this same road. You come to your house but when you get inside everything is different. The pictures on the wall have been replaced. The furniture is arranged the wrong way. Even the smell is different. The address is right, the house is correct, yet everything is off.

Many people feel the same way when they enter the church building. They've heard Jesus is a friend of sinners and God loves the world. They've been led to believe the people in church are friendly, and yet when they enter the building, they find something entirely inconsistent with those things they've heard.

We might think we're welcoming, but the reality can be entirely different. To ensure we're a welcoming church, let's go back to the beginning. We welcome others because of the gospel.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Titus 3:3-8a

³ For we too were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved by various passions and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, detesting one another. ⁴ But when the kindness of God our Savior and his love for mankind appeared, ⁵ he saved us—not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy—through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. ⁶ He poured out his Spirit on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we may become heirs with the hope of eternal life. ^{8a} This saying is trustworthy.

Titus was on his own. He had traveled with Paul, seen the power of the gospel to change people's lives, and even carried a letter from Paul to the church at Corinth. He had been a trusted companion of the greatest missionary the world has ever known, but now he was by himself.

Paul had left Titus on the island of Crete to organize and carry out the beginning of the church there. Surely with an assignment like that—in a place that was foreign to both the gospel and Judaism—Titus would have had many questions about his role: What does it mean to be a pastor? How do I set up the work of ministry? What should I do *first*?

Paul addressed practical questions like these in his letter to Titus, but along with answers to practical ministry questions, Paul also reminded Titus of something that was already very familiar to him: the gospel. So, with all the pressing questions of how to do the work of the church in Crete, why would Paul pause to remind Titus of something he already knew? We see three reasons in this passage:

How have you personally experienced the kindness and love of God?

QUESTION #2

- 1. The gospel keeps us from looking down on others (v. 3).** Paul reminded Titus that he—and all believers—was once just like the people Titus was seeking to welcome into the faith. We all were once lost, hopeless, and living for nothing else than to fulfill our next desire. When we remember that we are no better than those we are seeking to welcome, then we will look on others with compassion rather than judgment.
- 2. The gospel reminds us what is possible (vv. 4-5).** Paul reminded Titus that all of us, if we are Christians, have a moment of awakening to the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are born again, with a new heart, tastes, and desires.
- 3. The gospel points us to the future (vv. 6-7).** Thanks to the gospel, we all have a sure hope in the future. We are destined for eternal life with Jesus. We might not be as welcoming as we should be because we have a very temporal view of life. Welcoming others may require us to be uncomfortable or inconvenienced. We might need to step outside our shell. But when eternity is in the balance, these things are shown to be what they truly are: shortsighted objections.

If Titus wanted to create a sustained and empowered work for God on this island, he needed to remember the *why* before he started doing the *what*. The same is true for us. If any ministry we seek to do for God is not grounded in the *why* of the gospel, it will eventually run out of steam. So, if we want to welcome others into the church, we must remember that at one point we ourselves were on the outside looking in. And if God had not rolled out the welcome mat with the life of His own Son, that's where we would have stayed.

Titus 3:8b

^{8b} I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed God might be careful to devote themselves to good works. These are good and profitable for everyone.

True, faithful, joy-filled, and sustained ministry to others flows out of the gospel of Jesus. That's because what God has done in us through Jesus always works itself out in good works. This was exactly Paul's point to Titus. Because of the gospel of Jesus, Titus should respond with ministry to others: "These are good and profitable for everyone."

What are some ways you've seen good works really make a difference?

QUESTION #3



Sometimes we have trouble understanding this because we think of the gospel as the way we begin a relationship with God in Christ. This is certainly true, but it's not all the truth.

We often think of the message of the gospel—Jesus lived a perfect life, died a substitutionary death, and rose victoriously from the grave—as the means that enables us to enter the Christian life. That certainly is true, but it doesn't go far enough. The gospel of Jesus Christ doesn't just get us started, we are meant to be driven in daily life by the cross and the resurrection. We don't move past the gospel; we continually dwell and live in the gospel so that it permeates everything we do, including the way we welcome others. At times, we can feel secure and safe in our own friendships and don't want to reach out to others. It may also feel uncomfortable relating to people who look, act, and believe differently than we do. It's in those times we have to remind ourselves of the truth of the gospel. We have to reconnect with the truth that God welcomed us. At some point, we too were strangers and also needed the welcome mat rolled out. By remembering this, we will find new energy to welcome others joyfully into the church.

Titus 3:9-11

⁹ But avoid foolish debates, genealogies, quarrels, and disputes about the law, because they are unprofitable and worthless. ¹⁰ Reject a divisive person after a first and second warning. ¹¹ For you know that such a person has gone astray and is sinning; he is self-condemned.

Having spent time in Crete, Paul knew the issues that might distract Titus from his mission. The issues Paul mentioned were of personal

preference and self-centeredness, but they were not limited to Crete. We are all tempted to lose our focus and fixate on issues of personal preference.

When we allow personal preference and self-centeredness to creep into ministry, it is destructive to our mission. Still, the temptation is strong to wave the banner of preference in our churches, but by focusing on our self-centeredness, we reveal certain misunderstandings we have about the church:

- ▶ **Our role in the church.** Churches can engage in all types of arguments that are ultimately trivial. When we argue about carpet colors and worship styles—all matters of personal preference—we show that we really believe the church exists to meet our needs and expectations rather than being the body of Christ for others.
- ▶ **The composition of the church.** God's desire is to redeem people of every tribe, tongue, and nation to worship Him for all eternity. One of the most convincing things about Christianity during the days of the early church was how the church was made up of different types of people. The fact these individuals were able to worship together despite their personal preferences shows the unifying power of the gospel.
- ▶ **The nature of the church.** The church is much more than a building for people to worship in. When we gather together, it's as if God places the gathering of His people on display before all the powers in heaven as a showplace of His wisdom. This grand purpose magnifies just how trivial arguments of personal preference are.

What steps can we take to redirect debates toward kingdom-focused conversations?

QUESTION #4

How can the truths of Titus 3:3-11 help our group be more welcoming?

QUESTION #5

MY PREFERENCES

For each of the following sentences, describe your preferences. Then answer the questions.

I prefer to go to a church service at this time of day:

I prefer to sing/hear this type of music at church:

I prefer to hear more from this person during church:

I think the offering should be taken at this point in the service:

I prefer to sit here when I come to church:

I prefer to sit in/at [chairs/pews/tables]:

Review your list of responses. Could any of your responses become a point of conflict within the church? How does that type of conflict look to people who visit your church?

"Most church members have forgotten what it's like to be a first-time guest!"

—DR. THOM S. RAINER

LIVE IT OUT

Our lives should be a welcome mat into the church. We can assume that posture when we focus on the gospel. Conduct a reality check by choosing one or more of the follow applications.

- ▶ **Remind yourself.** Identify a practical way you can remind yourself of the gospel this week.
- ▶ **List.** Create a list of things that, in your opinion, would be the ideal way to “do” church. Identify which of those items are integral to the mission and ministry of the church and which ones are based on your personal preferences.
- ▶ **Befriend.** Make an intentional effort to befriend someone who is different than you. Consider what you can do to make that person feel welcome in your church.

Our church may not be able to meet every person’s expectations, but if we are transformed by the gospel, we can be a welcome mat rather than a stumbling block to others.

My thoughts

