



Essence Week One

Opening Prayer

God, thanks for bringing us together here. Help our time to be life giving and enjoyable.

If you are a new group and this is your first meeting:

- Start things by reading Our Growth Group Values (see the bottom of this document).
- Before you dive into the questions, go around the group and share: Your name, how you found EastLake Church, what brought you back the second time, and why you decided to join a group.

If you are a new group and this your second meeting:

- Start things off by sharing your name and your favorite way to spend a day off. Share a little about who you'd spend the day with, what you would do, and what the goal of the day would be.

Talk It Over

This new series is all about looking at the essence of what it means to be a Jesus follower and how to find our core identity in God.

- Growing up what messages — whether positive or negative — did you see or hear about your identity? Where did you get these messages from? Was it media, friends, family, or through another source?
- When it comes to this topic of identity, who specifically has helped you build a healthy identity? How did this person go about positively teaching you about your identity?

Read Colossians 1:19-23 (English Standard Version)

The Bible tells us that living as a Christ follower is meant to transform not only how we see God, but also how we see ourselves. Regardless of how clean or messed up our life may be, following God means understanding he loves us and we are saints in God's eye. God says we are holy, sacred, and set apart. Our sainthood isn't something we earn or prove, it's simply a part of our core identity in God.

- If you needed to describe yourself to someone, what would you say? What words would you use to describe yourself today?
- How comfortable or uncomfortable are you being called a 'saint'? Why is that the case?
- This verse, along with many others, helps us to understand that the byproduct of knowing God is loving others. What other steps, actions, or behavior did you believe you needed to accomplish or produce in order to live out your faith?

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Read Colossians 19:23 (New Living Translation)

Paul was writing to normal people when he wrote these words — these people weren't special, perfect, living without conflict, or flawless in their theology. That invitation laid out for them to learn how to walk out their core identity as people who have been set apart by God is extended to us as well. The Christian life is not about us achieving something to get God's approval, but rather about us accepting the approval God has already given us. Again, the focus is not perfection here. We all have hurts, habits, hang ups, and sins we need to own. But as we own our brokenness, we are called to remain aware and connected to our true identity as saints.

- Allowing culture, media, past, others, or even our own thoughts define our identity may leave us stuck in many ways. In what ways have you been stuck in the past or present because you weren't owning who God says you are? Look at your behavior, thought process, how you view yourself, and so on.
- When you do something wrong are you quicker to wallow in your imperfection or to blame other people for the issue? Give an example that describes your propensity.
- Have you ever seen someone who did a good job at owning their imperfection while honoring their true identity in Christ? Describe what you observed and saw in that person.

Read Ephesians 2:8-9 (The Voice)

It can be easy for us to forget that our faith is built on what God has done and said about us — our faith is not built on our performance, pursuit of excellence, or efforts. Our faith is built on God's generous love for us and through the generous power of his spirit.

- In what ways do you feel you still try to earn God's approval?
- What might change in your life by soaking in God's love for you and owning who God says you are?

Closing Prayer

God, help us to see ourselves how you see us. Help us to see that we are saints in your loving arms — not sinners trying to appease your anger. We want to walk out life knowing who you say we are.

(Our Growth Group Values on next page.)

Our Growth Group Values

We've found that it's a good idea for groups to look at their shared values, expectations, and commitments right off the bat so that every member starts on the same page.

At EastLake Church, groups exist to help people grow in friendship and faith.

This is true of our group too: We are here to grow in friendship and our faith.

In efforts to get the most of our time together this group's season, we want everyone to try and come consistently to group and to communicate if we need to miss a week.

At EastLake Church, we value safe environments. Here is what this means for your group:

- There are no perfect people allowed. While we don't suggest anyone gets transparent on week one about personal issues, we do encourage everyone to authentically show up each week.
- We are all in process therefore we should plan to be patient and gracious toward one another.
- While we aim to show care about what is happening in one another's lives, and we hope to encourage one another in practical and life-giving ways, this group is not going to solve people's problems. When and if we want people to speak into our current situation, we can directly ask for wisdom and ideas.
- We want everyone to share from the heart, but we don't want this to be a place we throw others under the bus. Let's be considerate and careful about the way in which we talk about others.
- There is rarely just one right or wrong answer to a discussion question. Most often there are several different perspectives and facets to one question. We make room for the various ideas people bring to the table. The goal of most questions is to get you to think about Jesus, God, the Bible, life and so on.
- We give each other permission to respectfully ask difficult questions and cheer each other on toward real life change.
- We all have our doubts, curiosities, and questions about God. We make space for them here.
- We don't monopolize the conversation; we take turns.
- Friendships take time and happen organically; we don't rush the process.
- We share ownership of this group. There are various ways each member can volunteer — e.g. snacks, sending reminders, taking weekly attendance, organizing childcare, plan fun events, and so on.
- What is shared in your growth group stays in your growth group. If something is shared that presents a concern that needs further spiritual or legal input, please contact karla@eastlakechurch.com.

In addition, to our Group Values here are some important ground rules:

Growth groups are not for selling products, raising funds, or political pitches.

- If you represent a career or a product in your professional life, you can discuss this outside the group on a personal, relational level, but no one wants the growth group to become a sales or fundraising pool.

- This is not a voting box so don't turn our group into the next political debate. Leave that up to CNN.
- Growth groups are not dating services. Though people have met and married through our growth groups, this is not a dating service.