

## **Transformation U Week 5: Inside, Outside, Upside Down**

Isaiah 42:1–9 • Matthew 18:18–20 • Ephesians 11–22

**Eph. 2:11** Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men)— **12** remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. **13** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

**Eph. 2:14** For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, **15** by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, **16** and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. **17** He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. **18** For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

**Eph. 2:19** Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. **21** In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. **22** And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Robert Frost, the great American poet, once wrote,

Something there is that doesn’t love a wall,  
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,  
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;  
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.<sup>1</sup>

Here in Salt Lake City, we get that, because we know that it applies to streets with their potholes, sidewalks with tree-roots pushing up, and snow fences that buckle with the drifting snow. “Something there is that doesn’t love a human restriction” and that finds a way to break it down or break it up. But we live in a time when our nation and our world seem to really like walls. We put up walls of partisan politics, and privacy fences in our back yards. Our communities and states are increasingly dividing up by economic and social class—so that the poor, the rich and the middle class don’t have to mix too much. We separate our generations too—most days, children and parents go their separate ways and come back together at the end of the day, and those who require special care we institutionalize. The Israelis have put up

<sup>1</sup><https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44266/mending-wall>

a wall between them and the Palestinians. Some would like us to complete a wall between us and Mexico. Oh yes, our society and our world like walls. In a world that loves walls, how do we live meaningful lives?

First, remember what it was like without God in our lives. For some of us that's easy—we still aren't sure of this God thing, or that Jesus loves us! Perhaps that's why you're here today—on the hunt for something you feel like you're missing. For some of us remembering's a little harder. Even though I grew up in a church, there came a point when I recognized how outside of God's promises I really was, when I wasn't sure if there was a God, and how hard it was to find hope and a reason for living. That sense of longing in the midst of separation, of despair in an uncaring universe, and of loneliness when I was surrounded by people—as I remember those, I realize how true those still are in some of the people around me. Remembering what it was like to be on the outside helps us be mindful and compassionate with the people we meet.

Second, work to recognize and change when we are creating insiders and outsiders. One of the things lots of Christians do is to develop their own language and culture. Have you ever had that experience? But if you're not on the inside, special words and ways of doing things, are just confusing. The special language and culture that grows up to form a kind of barrier—if you are an insider, you know the lingo; if you are an outsider, you can feel left out or uncomfortable. Jesus came to remove those barriers between us and God and between us and others. As we become aware of these barriers, we need to work against the tendency of putting up walls.

So let's take these two ideas from our passage and see how they might transform how we think of church. This summer, Mike McIntire and I had the chance to go to the National Association's Annual Meeting and Conference in Milwaukee. It's a gathering of people from Congregational churches from around the country where we learn about God, recharge our batteries in worship, and share good ideas with each other. One of the workshops that Mike and I went to was by Justin Berkobien. He talked about ministry that made Mike and I go "hmmmm." If you open to the inside left page, you'll see one of the things that got us thinking. Justin divided up what churches do into three categories—inside, bridge and outside. The first kind is "inside" ministries are "by us for us," where we get closer to God and grow in our faith. Can you think of ministries that our church has that are "inside" ministries?

[Take responses from the congregation.]

Sure! The idea is that we are ministering to the needs of people who are already in our fellowship. When we have been working hard, these events are where we come to recharge, and to make sure we haven't erected barriers between us and God.

The second kind is "bridge" ministries, which are "by us, for them." Justin adds, they are "safe spaces hosted by the believing community designed to make faith exploration accessible for newcomers." Can you think of ministries that our church does that are "bridge" ministries?

[Take responses from the congregation.]

Yep! The goal of these "bridge" ministries is to help people find their way into the community of faith, to help them know grace is for them, and that they belong.

The last kind of ministry is “outside” ministries, “by them for them.” These are “community gatherings and activities out in society that are not religious in nature.” In this kind of ministry, we are going to share grace with others—no strings. Can you think of ministries that our church does that are “outside” ministries?

[Take responses from the congregation.]

Right! Hmmm seems like we could do more in this category. I love Justin’s note about how “Too much inside-emphasis leads to atrophy of missional muscles (stuck-ness). Too much outside-emphasis leads to burnout. Too much bridge-emphasis leads to arrested development and discontent.”

Robert Frost wrote, “Something there is that doesn’t love a wall,” and he talks about the irresistible forces of nature, and later, he even hints that he knows what it might be, but you and I are here today because we know that “Something” is really “Someone.” Paul writes, “The Messiah has made things up between us so that we’re now together on this, both...outsiders and...insiders. He tore down the wall we used to keep each other at a distance... Christ brought us together through his death on the Cross. The Cross got us to embrace, and that was the end of the hostility.” (Ephesians 2:14, 16) It’s not that our differences disappear, but that in Jesus, our differences don’t have to limit us. Democrats and Republicans—we all long for Jesus to change and renew us. Conservative and liberal—we know God’s Kingdom has come when our kids can play together and have hope for a better tomorrow. Whether you are sure in your faith, exploring the idea of faith, or not sure you have a faith—we all came today hoping God would show up, that something would change in us, that God’s love and grace might penetrate the walls of our hearts, and that we would find a way to make Jesus more Lord of our lives than He was yesterday—we came to find God today. No, walls are generally not God’s idea. Humans build walls. God builds a home and a bridge to get there. When we are together, we are not strangers or aliens, rich or poor, insiders or outsiders—we are family, built on Jesus Christ. When we really get that we are family, we have the possibility to turn the world upside down for good.

## Ephesians 2:11–22 (NIV)

**Eph. 2:11** Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men)— **12** remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. **13** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

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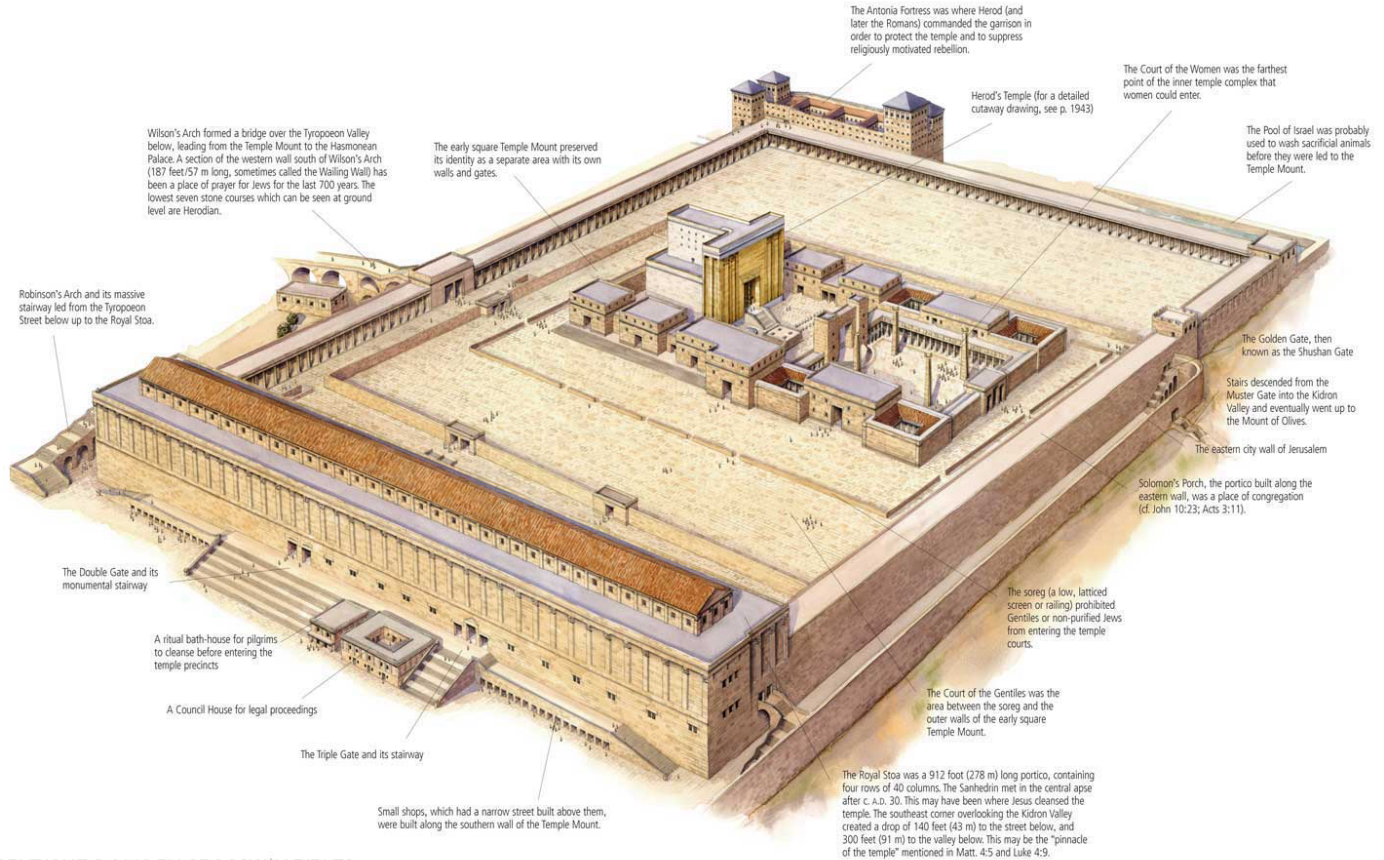
## Ephesians 2:11–22 (The Message)

**Eph. 2:11** But don’t take any of this for granted. It was only yesterday that you were outsiders to God’s ways **12** had no idea of any of this, didn’t know the first thing about the way God works, hadn’t the faintest idea of Christ. You knew nothing of that rich history of God’s covenants and promises in Israel, hadn’t a clue about what God was doing in the world at large. **13** Now because of Christ—dying that death, shedding that blood—you who were once out of it altogether are in on everything.

**Eph. 2:14** The Messiah has made things up between us so that we’re now together on this, both non-Jewish outsiders and Jewish insiders. He tore down the wall we used to keep each other at a distance. **15** He repealed the law code that had become so clogged with fine print and footnotes that it hindered more than it helped. Then he started over. Instead of continuing with two groups of people separated by centuries of animosity and suspicion, he created a new kind of human being, a fresh start for everybody.

**Eph. 2:16** Christ brought us together through his death on the Cross. The Cross got us to embrace, and that was the end of the hostility. **17** Christ came and preached peace to you outsiders and peace to us insiders. **18** He treated us as equals, and so made us equals. Through him we both share the same Spirit and have equal access to the Father.

**Eph. 2:19** That’s plain enough, isn’t it? You’re no longer wandering exiles. This kingdom of faith is now your home country. You’re no longer strangers or outsiders. You *belong* here, with as much right to the name Christian as anyone. God is building a home. He’s using us all—irrespective of how we got here—in what he is building. **20** He used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now he’s using you, fitting you in brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone **21** that holds all the parts together. We see it taking shape day after day—a holy temple built by God, **22** all of us built into it, a temple in which God is quite at home.



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