Quick-Connect Guide
Use the questions in this section if your group is already studying something else and won’t be using the full discussion guide.

• Share a time you looked at your life and wondered: “How did I get here?”

• What does it mean to you to be “rooted and established in God’s love?”

Discussion Guide
In this section, you will find an opening prayer, discussion questions, next steps, and a closing prayer. The discussion questions are separated into three categories—Getting Started, The Basics, and A Little Deeper—and are designed to allow the group discussion to deepen as you move through them. Use the prayers, questions, and next steps in whatever manner you find helpful based on your group’s needs. The Message Recap might help you and the group to prepare or to remember key points.

Opening Prayer

Father in heaven, thank You for life today and an opportunity to gather in our group. Help us to be present to Your Spirit and to one another. Guide us now in our time together. Amen.

Getting Started

• Ice Breaker: What was one “high” and one “low” from this past week?

• Share a time you looked at your life and wondered: “How did I get here?”

The Basics

Have one person read Ephesians 3:14-19 aloud as a group.

• What are the desires Paul has for the people of Ephesus in this prayer? Which of those desires do you long to be true for you?

• What does it mean to you to be “rooted and established in God’s love?” Or, put differently, what do things in your life look like when you are not firmly rooted in God’s love?

• Which of the four ways to guard your heart that Steve taught is the most difficult for you? Why?

A Little Deeper
• As you think about the last week, what caused you particular bewilderment about another’s behavior? As you probe deeper, can you identify the stories that you might have told yourself about their behavior or choices?

• Similarly, consider your own behavior, particularly what caused you frustration or angst this past week. Can you be kind to yourself and be curious, perhaps naming the root issue? (a conclusion such as, “I don’t feel seen or feel adequate.”)

• Think of someone who behaves very differently than you (at work, school, the neighborhood). Are there judgments regarding their behavior that you’ve made without knowing the root cause?

Next Steps
Review the next steps below and consider which one or ones each member of the group would like to commit to for the upcoming week (and beyond).

• Pray and Journal. Create some intentional space to ask God to reveal the quality of the fruit you are producing. Ask Him to reveal the root cause of frustration or anger you have toward someone. Also ask Him to suspend judgment you may have toward another due to poor choices they are making. Inquire if there are necessary steps needed to get to the root of a situation at hand.

• Reach Out. Is there someone in your life who is struggling with hurt? How might you reach out to them this week and listen to their story? Ask God to show you how to be a good friend, mentor, or listener for that person.

• Pray about Next Weekend. Authors Anne Lamott and Lee Strobel bring very different stories of how God reached them with the grace of Christ. Pray about whom God might be prompting you to invite to church next weekend, as well as the upcoming Easter services on April 15-16.

Closing Prayer
Pray for whatever difficulties or needs were shared during your time together and have someone close by reading the prayer below.

_God, thank You that your love alone keeps us established and rooted._
_Please guide us to lean into this love as our only source of life._
_Guide us to be the kind of group that encourages each other constantly to look to You. Amen._

Message Recap
Steve Carter

“The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was bewildered.” Like this verse at the end of the third chapter of Esther, there are times we are bewildered by the choices and behavior of others. Similarly, there are choices we make that bewilder others.
In chapter two, Esther won the favor of everyone and was made queen to King Xerxes. Shortly thereafter, Haman, an Agagite, was given the highest seat of honor in the king’s palace. All the royal officials at the king’s gate knelt down and paid honor to him. But Mordecai, Esther’s beloved and trusted cousin, would not kneel down and pay him honor. This enraged Haman, and upon learning Mordecai was a Jew, Haman was not satisfied with killing him alone, but instead looked for a way to destroy all of Mordecai’s people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom. He therefore fabricated stories about the Jews to King Xerxes, pointing out their different customs and that they did not obey the king’s laws. Haman proposed to the king that a decree be issued to destroy them, and the king, sealing the decree with his signet ring, allowed Haman to do as he pleased with the Jews. The edict was issued as law and the couriers went out declaring the Jews be exterminated within 12 months. The chapter ends with the king and Haman sitting down to drink with the city of Susa bewildered by such an action.

Have you ever been in a situation where you sit back and wonder: How did we get here? How did we get to this drastic or desperate place? This is the tone at the end of chapter three in the book of Esther. Beneath the edict was something more. Haman was so enraged that killing Mordecai was not enough revenge to satisfy him. He went beyond that to fabricate stories about the Jewish people and eventually plotted to exterminate the entire Jewish race.

Throughout Scripture, we are warned to be cautious of our internal life so that our choices spring from a pure heart, one based on truth and love. Proverbs 4:23 says: “Above all else guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” Each thought and choice Haman made sunk him deeper into a place where eventually he plotted to kill an entire race, all because one man, Mordecai, refused to bid him the honor he desired.

If we imagine a tree growing fruit, we can trace the quality of the fruit back to the quality of its roots. If the fruit is bad, the roots are as well, attaching themselves to things other than the water, energy and light for which they were created. We are prone to attach ourselves to that which is not life giving or sustainable, thus producing bad fruit. Often, we are able to look at the bad fruit and be bewildered without ever understanding the root cause. More is required from us to understand what caused the bad fruit in the first place.

Jesus’ words in John 15:5 reinforce this: “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” In this verse we see that our good fruit only gets produced when we are attached to Jesus. When we attach ourselves to things that do not produce good fruit, we lose sight of that which began our downward spiral.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul prays that we might have the power to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is God’s love, knowing we are being “rooted and established” in His love, understanding that only God’s love is sustaining and life-giving.

Four things can help us guard our heart:

1. **Create space.**

   Purposely put margins in your daily schedule so that, when you are emotionally triggered, you have the time and space to listen to what God may reveal is really going on in your heart. This extra space is needed to get to the root cause of the issue since often it is beyond anything
obvious. This kind of space allows God to speak to us, deepening our intimacy with Him as a good, good Father.

2. Name the root.

Avoid fixating on the fruit, but be curious. Do the harder work to identify and name the actual cause. This requires dealing with the actual pain. For example, a “root” may be something as subtle as, “I did this because I was hurt and felt unseen,” or “I made this choice because I don’t feel I am enough.” Another example might be an alcoholic who no longer drinks, yet still carries out addictive behaviors because she never uncovered the root of her drinking problem.

3. Play it out and play it back.

When we evaluate our true motives, we find there are stories at play, some based on fact and others based on fiction. When we play out the story behind our angst or frustration, for example, we often uncover the story we’ve told ourselves ultimately getting to the root. Play it out and ask yourself, “If I do this, or continue this, what will this mean for my relationships?”

4. Detach and Attach.

We are meant to feed off of the love of God, which keeps us rooted and established, thus leading us to produce good fruit. When we understand the root of an attachment, we can often see that it is something other than God’s love, peace and mercy. When we detach from it, we are able to let go and reattach to God’s unfailing love, which frees us and produces the good fruit we desire.