

*Going Deeper: A Study in the Book of Ephesians*

# MAKING SPIRITUAL FRIENDS





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# Major Themes in Ephesians 1-3

## THE GOSPEL CHANGES EVERYTHING ABOUT US!

We are radically and eternally changed by the work of Christ. The believer is made into a new person—their standing before God, their relationships with one another, and their worldview are all changed. These new realities are called **positional truths**—things that are now true of us based on the finished work of Christ on our behalf. The first half of Ephesians highlights and emphasizes our new position in Christ.

## IDENTITY IS EVERYTHING

Often we are introduced to the Christian life by being taught what we are and are not supposed to do. Paul starts by teaching us **who we are in Christ**. Later, in chapters 4-6 he then teaches us how to live. If we do not start with our identity in Christ, our identity will be attached to **our** obedience rather than to **Christ's** obedience. Doubt, guilt, and fear will slowly seep into our minds and hearts if we are not convinced of our new adopted status in Christ. ***The most important thing about you is who you are in Christ!***

## UNIQUE PRAYERS

In prayer, we often pray for things that we do not have. In chapters 1-3, Paul is praying that we would fully comprehend and understand **what is already true about us!** The new identity we have in Christ is so powerful and transformative in nature, that it profoundly affects our perspective, reorients our source of power, and gives us the confidence and courage to live wholeheartedly for Christ in a broken world.

## A NEW FAMILY

The truths taught in the first half of Ephesians includes our adoption into a **New Family**. Everything about our relationship with God has been repaired and renewed. This restored relationship with God now gives us the opportunity to have peace and unity in our relationships with one another. Everyone who believes in the Gospel stands beloved in Christ. Therefore, we do not need to compete for attention, for love, or for blessings. We truly have the freedom to give love, resources, and forgiveness to one another without hesitation, suspicion, or self-serving motives.

## MAKING SPIRITUAL FRIENDS

In this new family, we are interdependent upon one another for mutual support and spiritual encouragement. We are designed to live life together as a family. Our desire and prayer for this year is ***that everyone who attends the church can find belonging***—a place where everyone knows your name, enjoys your company, and misses you when you are gone. **Life is a team sport and we are truly better together.**



# How to Use This Study

## PERSONAL STUDY

This is a verse by verse study of Ephesians 1-3. Verses will be listed and then studied. In each section questions and comments will be focused on understanding the passage followed by questions trying to apply the passage. Space is given for you to process, write, and journal.

## GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Individuals can simply study through these, but our hope is that everyone participates in groups and discuss these questions together. Eight different group discussions are located in this study. Share honestly, pray corporately, and enjoy the time together. We hope this study grows your group deeper and wider.

# Our Hopes for this Study

In this study, my hope is that we slow down and drink in all the realities of who we are in Christ. Your identity is ultimately found in Christ, not in your decisions, struggles, and fears. My desire is that our prayers begin to sound like the Ephesians prayers - asking God to give us a deeper understanding of His love for us in Christ. Finally, we want everyone to experience the blessings and benefits of being a part of God's family **by making spiritual friends.**

### We are hoping that everyone will:

- Join or start a group (info on website or group wall)
- Have conversations about their spiritual journey
- Laugh, celebrate, and care for one another

# EPHESIANS 1







# Ephesians 1

**1:1** *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

What do you already know about Paul? How did he become a Christian?

**Author:** Early church attestation holds to Paul as the author. He is designated as an apostle because Jesus Himself called Paul into His service (Acts 9).

Some argue against Paul's authorship. "In my opinion these verses express ideas passionately held by Paul and are paralleled in his unquestioned letters. Why they would be included by a later pseudonymous writer is unclear" (Snodgrass, 27).

**Date:** Paul calls himself "the prisoner of Christ Jesus" (3:1, 4:1). Likely Paul is writing during his Roman imprisonment around **61-62 A.D.** In Ephesians 6:19-20, he requests their prayers that he might speak "with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains."

**Relationship with the Recipients:** Paul has spent quite a bit of time with the Ephesians.

- Acts 18:18-21 - Paul visits during his second missionary journey in 52 A.D.
- Acts 19:1-20:1 - He returns during his third missionary journey and stayed for two and a half years.
- Acts 20:16-38 - He visits again one last time knowing that they will never see one another again.

How might this relationship have affected the way Paul writes the letter?

**Ephesus:** was the most important city in Asia minor (now Turkey). It had a harbor in the Aegean Sea and many established trade routes. It boasted of its temple to Diana (Greek - Artemis). Influencing Ephesus would have resulted in influencing many smaller cities in the area.

What city in America could be comparable to Ephesus?

## THE NATURE OF THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

- Most epistles have a clear issue, concern, or problem addressed. Much like Romans, Ephesians seems to be speaking to the universal church.
- Ephesians and Colossians are like sister letters as "1570 words in Colossians (34 percent) are paralleled in Ephesians" (O'Brien, 8).

## Personal Study

**3** *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.* **4** *For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.*

Paul quickly transitions from the greeting directly into worship. What about this subject would cause a response of worship?

What do we learn about the Trinity?

What is the significance of Jesus being called "our Lord?"

What spiritual blessings are we lacking?

Why would God bless us so profoundly and abundantly?

When did God chose us? How is this possible?

What did He chose for us to be?

The word for holy is the Greek word, *hagios*. This is the exact same word used to describe God Himself. Why is it necessary for us to be holy (*hagios*) in order to be children of God?

As a Christian, do you feel blameless?

What do we do when our feelings are inconsistent with our spiritual reality?

# Group Discussion 1 - Part of God's Family

*In love,<sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—<sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.*

## INTERPRETATION AND EXPLANATION

Was it a surprise to God that we would become His children?

Why did He make us His children? By what means did he freely give us grace?

## APPLICATION

Ephesians 1 clearly communicates that we are “in Christ.” All the blessings and benefits of being God’s children are given to us because we are “in Him.” God is not describing a foster care situation, but an adoption. A new permanent family!

How would it change the conversations, feel, and commitment to our group if we truly viewed one another as eternal brothers and sisters in Christ?

Every believer is a brother or sister in Christ. When we sit across from a fellow Christian we must realize that they have received “every spiritual blessing in Christ,” they are chosen by Christ, and are “holy and blameless in his sight.” How should this reality change the way we view and treat one another?

Even Jesus demonstrates his commitment to the family of faith, “[Jesus] answered them, ‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ And looking out at those who sat around him, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother’” (Mark 3:33-35). How can we better demonstrate and live out the priority of our spiritual family in our group?

## GROUP ACTION POINT

Every significant relationship we have has a level of commitment along with expectations. A spouse commits to being faithful, available, and self-sacrificing. A friend is expected to be honest, present, and there in times of trouble. Even a sports team commits together to working hard, to consistency, and to teamwork. As a group, what level of commitment should you expect from one another? What level of commitment should the group agree upon?

## PRAY

Pray together that God would grow you as a family in commitment, consistency, and love for one another.

## Personal Study

***7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us.***

How is our redemption and God's grace connected?

Why is "his blood" necessary for our redemption?

What does it mean to be redeemed?

In the time when Paul is writing, the term, "redemption," was often used to describe being taken out of slavery and being set free. For the believer it is a declaration that we have been set free from the bondage of sin and set free from the power of death and Satan. This was only made possible through the death (blood) and resurrection of Jesus.

The payment or wage for our redemption was the death of Jesus on our behalf. Why would Paul say that God's grace was "lavished on us?"

Did we deserve to be redeemed? Is there anything that we did to make our redemption possible or more secure?

How would you describe this kind of grace to a friend?

***With all wisdom and understanding, 9 he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.***

What is the "mystery of God's will?"

How did God make known to us the "mystery of his will?"

Why did He make this known to us?

Jesus, and God's redemptive plan finally revealed in Christ, is the mystery that all OT saints have been waiting to see revealed and explained. In His wisdom and timing, not ours, God revealed the beauty of the Gospel to us. It would be natural to suppose He did this primarily for our benefit, but Scripture is clear, He did this "according to His good pleasure." We receive incredible benefits, but God is moved not just by His love for us, He is also moved by what brings pleasure and glory to Himself.



Why do you suppose the Lord waited until He did to send Christ into the world?

The Roman Empire soon became an enemy to all Christians, but what benefits did the Empire provide for the spread of the Gospel?

In what ways is there now unity between Old Testament and New Testament believers? Where else has Jesus brought unity where before there was division?

The Romans brought much of the known world under their rule and control. Roads, trade routes, and culture itself was impacted by the growth of this empire. Even though Rome itself was often an enemy to Christianity, the empire created pathways for the Gospel to quickly spread and expand throughout the world.

**11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12 in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.**

Who planned out our salvation? How?

Does it feel comforting or disturbing that God chose you?

How does "free will" fit into God's plan to "work out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will?"

Does man's will every conflict with God's will? Does it every supercede God's will?

Does the above passage coincide with your answer to the previous question?

What happens when Scripture seems beyond our ability to philosophically understand?

Where must we hold the line, and where do we have freedom to disagree in this area of "the chosen," "predestination," and free will?

What verses or passage would you use to teach and explain free-will?

1:3, 6, and 12 all speak of the centrality of God's glory. How can the Christian be centered around God's glory?

**13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.**

What was necessary for us to be included in Christ?

What are the benefits of our inclusion according to these passages?

What does it mean to be "God's possession?" When do we become God's possession?

The verse says that we already "are" God's possession. This is a present tense reality and blessing. Recognize, you are not your own! You are already God's. Your life is His. How might this change your perspective and decisions if this was on the forefront of your mind?

The Holy Spirit is a guarantee of our inheritance. He is our unbreakable seal - a contract signed and sealed.

Redemption

- The New Testament teaches that we have been redeemed (past tense) - Galatians 3:13 and 1 Peter 1:18.
- Notice "redemption" was in the present tense in Ephesians 1:7.
- Here in Ephesians 1:14, a future component of redemption is taught.

How can our redemption be in the past, present, and future tense?

If we are already completely forgiven, what is the future piece of redemption that we have to look forward to?

Why does Paul keep emphasizing "to the praise of His glory?"

How do we emphasize this same thing in our lives?

**15** *For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, 16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.*

"For this reason" is a reference to what?

What are the Ephesians know for? How would someone describe you and the way you live your life?

Why would Paul put so much effort into praying for them if they already seem to be doing so well?

What do we learn about the Trinity in these verses?

According to these verses, what role does the Holy Spirit play in our lives?

The Holy Spirit is mentioned several times throughout chapter one. How would you explain the role of the Holy Spirit to a new believer?

Why is it crucial for the Christian to understand the role of the Holy Spirit in their life?

Our entire life goal can be summarized by this statement: "that we may know Him better." Why is this so important? How do we live out this priority?

What happens when we know Him more?

How can this desire become the driving goal of our life?

Who in your life is praying that you might know the Lord more?

Who are you praying might know the Lord more?

## Group Discussion 2 - God's Power for God's Family

*18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength 20 he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.*

### INTERPRETATION AND EXPLANATION

Often, we view prayer as a time to ask for things that we do not have. Here, Paul is praying that we simply understand and truly believe in the reality of what we already have!

Why do the eyes of our heart need to be enlightened? What is “the hope” to which we have been called?

When Paul says that we have a “glorious inheritance” as His holy people, what does he mean?

God works His power in and through His people (us!). What is His power at work in us compared to in this section?

### APPLICATION

The power that God used to raise Christ from the dead is “the same as” the power that God works in and through His children! How might you view your life differently if you truly believed that this power was at work in you?

Jesus connects this power to His disciples living on mission together and every step (Matt 28:18-20). Jesus says that all power is His and His presence will be with us every moment as we live our life on mission. What happens if we think that our ability to influence our co-workers, neighbors, and friends comes from our own power, influence, and intellect?

### GROUP ACTION POINT

How might your group function differently if you together fully realized the hope and strength that is available to each of us? What is your next step to live in Christ's power together?

### PRAYER

Pray that you truly know and believe in the glorious hope we have in Christ. Pray that you and your group would live courageously in the power of Christ.



## Personal Study

Why is it so easy to lose sight of our hope and blessings in Christ?

What does verse 18 teach us about the importance of prayer? How is prayer connected to spiritual growth?

Where is Christ now seated? What is the significance of this?

Is there anything outside of His rule and authority?

If this is true, why do our lives so often feel out of control?

If Jesus is in control of everything, why is there still suffering and sin?

How should it impact our prayer life to know that it is God's power at work in us on behalf of others? How can you daily put this answer into practice?

## Group Discussion 3 - Jesus Saturates Everything

*22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.*

### INTERPRETATION AND EXPLANATION

How is Jesus described in these verses? How would you explain His relationship to the church?

"Only Jesus can fill everything in every way. A core commitment of every local church is to continually illuminate this mystery: Jesus is More. Therefore, the Church is made for More. The Church is chosen by Jesus to express His fullness into every corner of culture and into every sphere of society" (Exponential, Made for More).

Ephesians 1:22-23 tells us the church is a representation of Jesus' body that fills everything in every way. What practical examples can you think of in life where one thing can completely fill another thing? List a few.

### APPLICATION

What is the difference between more effort and more Jesus (1 Peter 4:11)?

When we rely on Jesus, we make much of Him. We can work hard while having peace, contentment, and joy trusting the results to Him.

What does it mean for the church to be the fullness of Jesus in everything and every way? How does this change your perspective on your life and on the group?

What does the truth of Ephesians 1:22-23 say about the church's potential for reaching into every nook and cranny of society with the fullness of Jesus?

### GROUP ACTION POINT

How can you and your group better mobilize yourselves to carry the fullness of Jesus into more corners of our neighborhoods and city?

"If the incarnational mission of Jesus reminds us that we are sent ones, the resurrectional mission of Jesus reminds us that we are the mobilizing ones. We believe every nook and cranny of the whole world is under the authority of our magnificent, cosmic King Jesus. WE are mobilized to fill everything everywhere with the fullness of Jesus. The resurrected Christ reminds us there is no place where we are not sent!" (Exponential, Made for More, 30).

### PRAY

Pray that God uses you and your group to make much of Jesus in your circles of influence.

## Personal Study

How has this passage convicted you personally about something in your life or your group? What are some next steps you can take?

All new steps include change. Change is hard! Why is the mission worth the change?

# EPHESIANS 2







## Ephesians 2

**2:1** *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, **2** in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. **3** All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.*

Society often teaches that man's nature is generally "good." How does this point of view line up with Scripture?

What about the person who helps the old lady across the street?

- Did they do it for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31)?
- Did they do it in faith (Romans 14:23)?
- Did they do it in the name of Christ and with a thankful heart (Colossians 3:17)?

The world will often lower God's standard of holiness in order to claim that humans have a generally "good" nature. What happens when we lower God's standards?

Did Jesus ever lower the standards (Matthew 5:48)?

What are we taught in Romans 3:9-12?

Why does society fight against the Scriptural truth that we all have a sinful nature? What would happen if they admitted that we are all fallen and morally flawed?

How do the realities of 2:1-3 impact your view of the work of the cross?

According to this passage, who was our ruler before Christ?

How would you describe our relationship to our sinful nature before Christ?

**4** *But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, **5** made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.*

If we do not believe verses 2:1-3, then Jesus' love doesn't seem that impressive—because He didn't actually save us from very much. Jesus becomes viewed as a good teacher and a moral role model

instead of the Savior who died on the cross to bear the incredible weight of all my sins.

Believing verses 2:1-3 helps us comprehend "his great love for us". How is Jesus "rich in mercy"?

Who made us alive? How?

What is the significance of being "alive in Christ"? What does that mean?

What could we have accomplished on our own "when we were dead in transgressions"?

What is the right response to grace?

- Romans 2:4 -
- Titus 2:11-12 -
- Romans 11:30-32 / Response - 11:33-34 -

When are you most likely to doubt God's "great love" for you?

**6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.**

You woke up this morning in your bed which is located firmly on the ground here on planet earth, how is it that we are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms?

How is our salvation both present and future at the same time (how is it already and not yet)?

Describe what you have learned about the kindness of God so far in Ephesians:

"The coming ages" - "implying one age supervening upon another like successive waves of the sea, as far into the future as thought can reach" (O'Brien, 173).

It was because of God's love and mercy (2:4) that He set out to save us. Now that we have been saved, His love and grace are now on display. His motivation turned to action and becomes a source of worship.

For all of eternity, we will be a billboard of God's incredible grace! From objects of wrath to objects of grace.

For all of eternity, you will be an example of God's great love. How can you be more of a billboard of God's love today?

## Group Discussion 4 - God's Handcrafted Masterpieces

*8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

### INTERPRETATION AND EXPLANATION

2:8-9 - How were we saved? How much credit do we receive for our salvation?

2:10 - what were we made and saved to do?

What happens if we get the order and roles of grace and works reversed?

### APPLICATION

Each of us are "God's handiwork", designed and fashioned to be just as God desired. You were born in a particular time and place into the family He chose for you. With intentionality, God has gifted you for the good works He has planned for you. What are some of the things that you believe God is calling you to do with your particular passions and skills in the church and in the city for the growth of His church?

How do we learn our spiritual gifts? How can your group and spiritual friends help in this discovery process?

What happens when we do not use our particular gifts?

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 and Ephesians 4:11-16 teaches that God placed each of us into His body for the common good of the church and for the growth in maturity of the church. When we do not play our role, everyone suffers and the church as a whole does not grow as God desires and designed.

### GROUP ACTION POINT

"A core commitment of the local church is to help disciples investigate their masterpiece: their personal calling to be a one-of-a-kind Masterpiece on Mission for More. Every disciple is a unique, handcrafted-by-God vessel for expressing the fullness of Jesus into every corner of culture and into every sphere of society" (Exponential, Made for More, 40).

How do we help one another discover God's desire and design for each person in the group?

### PRAYER

Pray that God uses our personal and unique group gifts for the growth and expansion of His Kingdom.

## Personal Study

Personal Reflection: To what degree am I living out my Masterpiece Mission?

How well am I doing at revealing the fullness of Jesus where I live, work, study and play?

**11** *Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands)— 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 by the blood of Christ.*

In the Old Testament, God had chosen the Jewish people as his light on the hill for all nations to know Him. He gave them particular commandments, laws, rituals, signs (like circumcision) and promises. He distinguished them from all the other people groups with the intent of keeping them pure and set apart.

With incredible failure, the Israelites consistently followed other gods, interwoven themselves with the other nations, and drifted from God and His commandments.

- God's O.T. People = Israel
- The Gentiles = All other people groups

Now, in Christ there is one people. Where there was a dividing line and hostility, there is now peace. Why do you suppose Paul had to address this issue with the Ephesians?

Two groups who were separated from one another (Jews and Gentiles) are now both under Christ as one people. This is a seismic change for each group. Is change easy or hard for people?

After thousands of years of being distinct and separate from all others, what would it have been like for Israel to now share God's personal presence and promises with the rest of the world?

How does it change your view of the Old Testament, knowing that we are part of many of the promises given to God's people in the Old Testament?

**14** *For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in 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.*



Throughout the New Testament there is a rumbling of this struggle for unity between Jewish and Gentile believers. There is still some distinction for Israel (Romans 11:25-30), yet many of the distinctions are now removed. "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him" (Romans 10:25).

How did Jesus make the two people groups one?

Does one group have more access to the Father than the other?

What are some ways today that we create dividing lines between us and other brothers and sisters in the Lord?

How can we break down some of those man-made dividing lines?

When then is it reasonable to divide and when is it better to stay together?

Whenever a point of view or position arises that detracts from or denies the Gospel, there needs to be consideration, conversation, and a call back to doctrinal purity. If a core component of the Gospel is denied, division is likely necessary.

Concerns over methods (style of music, mode of baptism, frequency of communion, number of deacons...) should be considered and discussed, but disunity and division should never be considered. This would be similar to a spouse threatening divorce every time they don't like the dish that was cooked for dinner. Our commitment to unity must supersede our commitment to our preferences or points of view on non-Gospel related matters.

What happens when we treat our preferences as "Gospel-level concerns?"

How can you increase your level of commitment to unity?

It is important to remember that Jesus died for the sake of our unity, He prayed for our unity (John 17), and gave us the Spirit so that we would be unified (Ephesians 4:1-3) - to not value and commit ourselves to unity is to set our values against the values of Christ Himself!

What are some ways that you can do a better job promoting peace, unity, and love within the church?

What can you do when you hear people grumbling or speaking poorly about someone else?

How can you respond when you hear people simply raising suspicion against the church, other groups in the church, or against the pastors?

## Group Discussion 5 - God's People in God's House

*19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his 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.*

### INTERPRETATION AND EXPLANATION

What do we learn about God's household?

How does it grow?

### APPLICATION

What happens if the house shifts from its cornerstone and foundation? How do we keep ourselves connected to the right foundation?

How do we distinguish between Gospel-centered core truths that function as our foundation and peripheral truths that are important, but not foundational?

What does this passage teach us about unity?

### GROUP ACTION POINT

Is the group centered and unified upon the "foundation"? What peripheral issues have possibly taken center stage over the Gospel?

### PRAYER

Pray that the group is rooted in Christ, in the foundational truths, and is growing in unity.

Pray for God to give you clarity and direction as a group. Together ask God to guide and empower you.

# EPHESIANS 3







## Ephesians 3

**3:1** For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—  
**2** Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, **3** that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. **4** In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, **5** which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. **6** This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

Paul came to know Christ in a very unique way. Acts 9:1-19 tells us the story of Paul encountering Jesus on the road to Damascus. Jesus Himself meets and shares with Paul and Paul response in belief.

Paul speaks of the mystery that has been revealed and made known to this generation. Previously, the mystery "was not made known" (3:5), and now "it has been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets" (3:6).

According to this passage, what is this mystery?

How was Jesus a "mystery" to previous generations?

Did the Old Testament speak about Jesus?

Much of the Old Testament is pointing directly to Jesus, even Jesus takes the time to show a couple disciples on their way to Emmaus how the Moses, the Prophets, and all the Scriptures point to Him (Luke 24:27).

Many details about Christ were communicated, but it was not clear. The OT was foreshadowing the coming Messiah, but the details and the experience were for this generation to experience.

Paul says the mystery is not just Jesus, but the fact that Jesus would make two people groups one. Believing Jews and Gentiles would both now heirs, members of one body, and share the promises of Christ.

How would the Jews have responded to this news? Would all of them have equally appreciated it?

How should the Gentiles (we) respond to this news?



## Group Discussion 6 - Making Much of Jesus

*7 I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. 8 Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, 9 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. 10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11 according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

### INTERPRETATION AND EXPLANATION

The "mystery" referenced in 3:9 (and in Colossians) is the Gospel which was foreshadowed in the Old Testament now clarified and realized through Christ in New Testament.

What kind of servant is Paul? How would you describe his mission?

What are the "boundless riches of Christ"? How would Paul make something as complicated as the "manifold wisdom of God" understandable and "plain" to others?

3:10 - "We should understand that it is because the Church alone is Christ's body and fullness that only through the Church can the principalities and authorities be shown with clarity the claim of Christ's lordship" (Lincoln, 188-9).

### APPLICATION

How would it change our view of evangelism if we saw ourselves as sharing the "boundless riches of Christ" with others who are spiritual poor, lost, and dead?

What is our call and commission as the church according to 3:10? What if the church does not live out its calling?

### GROUP ACTION POINT

All of us are servants of the Gospel, how can we plainly and clearly communicate these boundless riches to others? What are our next steps as a group?

### PRAYER

Spend time praying by name for those in your lives with whom you would like to share the Gospel.

## Personal Study

3:10 - "These Christians have been reminded that the presence of the church, the body of Christ, means that the authority of the rulers has been broken, that they cannot hinder the progress of the gospel, and that all things are to be subject to Christ. Such assurances would surely encourage them as they engage in a spiritual warfare and await the final day" (O'Brien, 248).

**12** *In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.* **13** *I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.* **14** *For this reason I kneel before the Father,* **15** *from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.*

How does verse 12 impact our prayer life?

Do you always feel full the freedom and confidence to approach God? When might we question this freedom?

Why would Paul be particularly excited about the freedom to approach the Father regardless of circumstances (6:20)?

Jesus told Paul that he would suffer (Acts 9:16). "Paul elsewhere makes clear the organic relationship between suffering and glory (2 Cor. 4:17, Rom. 8:17, 18). Here, too, in Ephesians suffering is the prelude to glory, except that in this case the suffering is Paul's while the glory will be his readers'" (O'Brien, 251).

How can the outcome of suffering for another be to the glory of God?

Are there ways we could be uncomfortable for the sake of others for the glory of God?

Why does Paul "kneel before the Father"?

What is the significance of verse 15 based upon the discussion from 3:2-6?

## Group Discussion 7 - Filled and Moved by His Love

*16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

### INTERPRETATION AND EXPLANATION

What is the role of the Holy Spirit in this passage?

What does it mean to be “rooted and established in love”?

What results from grasping the love of Christ?

### APPLICATION

How can we do a better job marinating in the love God has for us?

What would it look like for this love to motivate our words and actions? How does this look different than motivation derived from guilt?

What happens when our motivation comes from any source other than love?

### GROUP ACTION POINT

How can this group display the love of Christ to one another more?

Is there anything we can change about our group (structure, questions, or feel) to better show Christ's love to one another?

### PRAYER

Pray 3:16-19

## Personal Study

How is meditating on the Gospel connected to marinating ourselves in His love? Why should this be transformative?

## Group Discussion 8 - A Family of Faith and Worship

**20** Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, **21** to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen.

### INTERPRETATION AND EXPLANATION

It is important to see this passage in light of its context in the first 3 chapters. What kind of things has Paul been wanting them to imagine and ask for?

What happens when we take this verse out of its context and use it however we please?

How is the Lord brought glory according to these verses?

### APPLICATION

Is the group in line with the values and priorities outlined in these first three chapters of Ephesians? Based on Ephesians 1-3, what are the groups strengths and weaknesses?

There are few thoughts to believer more precious than the thought of Jesus' power and presence filling their lives and circles of influence. Jesus fills the church and grows the church to the glory of the Father. The picture of Jesus filling our neighborhood, workplace, family, and circle of friends is a beautiful thought.

Do your prayer requests include making much of Jesus in the lives of others?

### GROUP ACTION POINT

What do you as a group sense are some of your next steps for living out Ephesians 1-3 in your group?

How can your group help more people make spiritual friends?

### PRAYER

Pray for God to give you clarity and direction as a group. Together ask God to guide and empower you.





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