

September 7/8, 2024

**Praising the God Who Saves**  
*Salvation is a Life: A Study in Ephesians*  
**Ephesians 1:1-14**  
Pastor Ryan Harmon

Well, we've all heard stories like this before. Stories, sometimes that are so jaw dropping, so incredible, you almost can't believe that they're true. Here's the type of story I'm talking about. A family in New York, years ago, decided they wanted to go check out some garage sales. So they went to a neighborhood garage sale, fell in love with a piece of pottery, and decided to buy it. It was three dollars, and they took it home, put it on their shelf, and there it sat for years, holding up a pile of books and collecting dust. One day, one of the members of the family decided, "You know, I want to know a little bit more about where this piece of pottery came from." You can imagine their absolute shock when they learned this was a one-thousand-year-old piece of pottery from China. In time, it would go to auction and would sell for \$2.25 million dollars. Astounding! An absolutely underappreciated treasure sitting on their shelf collecting dust.

As I thought about that, and I consider the incredible truths that we are going to encounter as we open up the book of Ephesians, I began to wonder whether we, as believers, are in a bit of danger ourselves sometimes, of taking the salvation that God has brought to us in Christ and treating it a bit like that piece of pottery. Underappreciated...almost a hidden treasure, not because it's buried, not because it's been put away somewhere, but just because, due to familiarity, due to time, it's just come to be something that we've taken for granted. So, as we open this book, the question that I have for you this morning, if you are in Christ, is, "Do you know the treasure that you possess? Are you marveled at the salvation of God brought to you in Christ Jesus?" That's what we want to consider this morning as we open this book. So, turn with me to Ephesians, Chapter one, and let's hear what Paul has to say about what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 1, verse 1:

**Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus and *who are* faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.** (\*NASB, Ephesians 1:1-2)

So, this is a fairly standard opening for Paul. It should sound familiar to you. Like many of his letters, he typically follows what would just be a standard opening of an ancient letter in the ancient world. They'd usually begin with an introduction of who the author is, and then who the recipient of the letter is, and then typically would flow into a thanksgiving, and that's what we see here. There are a couple things, though, that stand out that are worth mentioning.

The first is that Paul calls himself an **apostle**. Now apostle, in the generic sense, is just someone who has been sent by God...a messenger. It's the generic sense of that word, but Paul is not using that generic sense when he calls himself an apostle. Paul is an apostle in the sense that he has been determined by the will of God, granted authority by God, to be a leader in the early church. That

is what he means when he says he is an apostle. He is given authority to proclaim this message of God about Jesus Christ to the world. Paul is the leader and has an incredible story. If you aren't familiar with it, I'd encourage you to go back into the book of Acts and read it. But he was a great persecutor of the church, zealous of the faith of Israel, thinking the Messiah was a sham. So he was persecuting the church and, on his way to go do some more persecuting, God met him. Jesus met him on the road to Damascus, knocked him off the horse, and his life was forever changed. He was commissioned as a missionary to the Gentiles—that is the non-Jewish world—to go proclaim this message of salvation. That's what Paul means when he calls himself an apostle.

Second, he refers to his audience as **saints**. Now saint sometimes is a word, depending on our background, kind of how we grew up, that maybe we start to think of as a specific individual that is supposed to be particularly venerated or honored. That's sometimes what we think of. But we need to understand the New Testament idea of *saint* is anyone who has placed their faith in Jesus Christ. Saints are the faithful in Jesus Christ. Anyone that's placed their trust in Him, their faith in Him, is a saint. If you have done that this morning, you are a saint. If you haven't done that and you want to place your faith in Jesus Christ this morning, that decision, that step of faith, moves you from the realm of not being a saint, not being a holy one of God, to being a saint. So, Paul is writing to the saints. He's writing to people just like you and me. If you were writing this letter to us today, he might say, “To the saints who are at Lincoln Berean church in Lincoln, Nebraska, who are faithful in Christ Jesus.” He's writing to the saints, the saints who are in Ephesus.

Now, as we go through this book, we'll want to draw out different historical contexts at different times. But let me just give you a brief overview of this city. Ephesus was an important city in the ancient world. In the Roman Empire, it kind of would have been considered as the third city: Rome, then Athens, and then Ephesus. It was an important city. It sits on the western coast of modern-day Turkey. It was called Asia Minor at the time, and it was kind of a hub for the roads into Asia Minor. So, a number of cities would have been kind of reliant on Ephesus as a trade port for all those kinds of things. So, it had great cultural influence and great economic influence in the ancient world. It was a city of about 50,000 people and, in fact today, it's one that is more excavated than most ancient cities in the world. And if you go to Ephesus today, you'll see mosaics like we have on the screen back here...beautiful mosaics! It was an incredible city.

Ephesus became known, in time, as a city where the goddess Artemis was particularly honored. Artemis was called *Artemis of the Ephesians*, and she was believed to have been a daughter of Zeus. She was honored in that city so much that they built a massive temple to her, and it became known throughout the ancient world as one of the *Seven Wonders of the Ancient World*. There was a temple that was larger than a football field. It was a magnificent building in that day and age. Artemis would have been looked to and worshiped in, especially Asia Minor, but throughout the Roman world. Artemis was believed to have been kind of a protector, someone who promoted the health of children and women, and particularly women in childbirth. Midwives would look to Artemis, and that was an important aspect of the way she was worshiped, the way she was honored. That will become relevant as we go through the text. But it's important for us to know that just as

Artemis was part and parcel...built into what it was to be an Ephesian...what it was to be in Ephesus...is that Artemis was on the scene.

The last thing about Ephesus that's important for us to note, is that when Paul is writing to the Ephesians, he's not writing to strangers. Paul had spent a lot of time in Ephesus, three years in fact. We believe he probably was imprisoned there for some time. He caused quite a ruckus there when he started to threaten the worship of Artemis with the gospel message. A whole uproar occurred in Ephesians because of Paul. Paul helped plant this church. Paul named these elders and, in fact, when he was leaving for Jerusalem, they gathered together at a port, and they wept over him. They loved him and he loved them. He's writing to people he knows. He's writing to people he loves. And so, what does he say to them?

He just called them saints...holy ones...people who had believed in the salvation message through Jesus Christ. And now, as he begins verse 3, he's going to start to reflect on this salvation. And as he does, he just starts to overflow with passion. He can barely contain himself, and it's going to be hard for me to even convey it. I'm going to try to take some big chunks and try to capture some of his passion. But if we were reading this in the original language, we'd see that verses 3 to 14 is just one long run-on sentence. Paul just can't contain himself, and he starts writing and he keeps writing, and instead of putting in a period, he keeps putting in a dash or a comma. He's overwhelmed. So, let's see what he has to say about this salvation that has come to us. Verse 3:

**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,**

So, as Paul sought out to consider and kind of start to unpack this salvation, he begins kind of with the end in mind. He turns to praise from the outset. He thinks about all that God has done in Christ, and he's saying the only proper response is praise. **Blessed be God.** May God be praised. So he begins, **Blessed be God.** Why? Well, because He's blessed us. How? He's given us **every spiritual blessing.** You could hear his passion in the repetition of that word, blessed...blessed...blessing. He's just overwhelmed with what God has done. This word blessing is a word that, throughout the New Testament, only refers to God. It's His work, because He's the only one that is worthy of praise, the only one that's worthy of blessing. But God is so rich in blessedness, that what He also does is, He turns around and He pours it out upon His people. He blesses us. And you can hear Paul reflecting on that, and as he reflects on that dynamic, he just starts to say, "Praise God! Praise God! Bless God!" Paul is thinking about the reality of God and His blessing. And it's easy to miss, but he also immediately kind of draws out what we call the three persons of the Godhead. God is a Trinity: Father, Son and Spirit. And he begins his praise by looking specifically at the Father. **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.** There's the *Son who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.* That phrase, **every spiritual blessing**, could easily be translated, *every blessing we have in and by the Spirit.* All three members of the Trinity, all of them involved in the great salvation that God has brought to us, and all worthy of all praise! And so, Paul is just overwhelmed, exuberant with praise.

But a question arises for us when we think about **blessing**. You know, in our world, we think about the word blessing, and typically our mind goes to things like physical blessings. You know, for a while, I don't know whether people still do this, but for a while, if there was a social-media kind of post that was glorious, or whatever, someone would put the hashtag, "Blessed," right? #Blessed. "Look at my vacation. #Blessed." "Look, my kids all smiled. #Blessed." You know, that's what we think of. We tend to think of physical blessings, and so for those of us reading this, we have to say, "Well, where exactly are these blessings?" And Paul outlines that. He says, "Well, they're **in the heavenly places in Christ**." And so, where exactly are the heavenly places? You know, we have a great theology of heaven, and we know that heaven is this place that we go when we die. It's this abode that we go to, to rest in the presence of Jesus, to be with Him face to face. But we also believe that heaven is, is kind of...I mean I don't want to diminish it...but it's like a glorious waiting area, as we await the final work of God, which is a new heaven and a new earth with resurrected bodies, where we will worship God when He finishes the work that He is doing. And so that is what heaven is, and it's going to be amazing! And it's why we have so much comfort when our loved ones pass on.

But that's not what Paul has in mind when he's talking about the **heavenly places**. The heavenly places, if I could describe them to you, I'd describe them a little bit more like a dimension or a realm. It's God's realm. It's where God is present fully. It's spiritual; it means it's not physical. That doesn't mean it's not real. It's absolutely real, but it's not something that we can see or that we can touch. It's a little different than that. It's God's realm. Paul is saying **we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places**. So we say, "Well, where is that?" And the answer to that is, "It's right here. It's all around us." The heavenly places, biblically, are the realm where God dwells, and it's kind of overlapped with our physical realm. And there is going to be a day where God is going to lift the veil, and the two are going to be merged. And He will dwell with His people, the most glorious member of this community that is God's family. That day is coming, but it's not yet. It's the heavenly places, God's realm. You could think of it a bit like this. It's—you know, analogies are always dangerous, because you can take them too far—but imagine it like this. In this room right now, there are signals bouncing all over the place. Radio signals, Wi-Fi signals, 5G signals, Bluetooth signals, all of them. We can't see any of them, but we know they're real. Last night, I was thinking as I was saying this, "I bet some people are accessing that signal right now to find out the score of the game." (*laughter*) I bet that's what's happening, and that's an important point. We can't see them, but they are real. And if you have the right device, you can access them. You can tap into that world. And we, through Christ, have been given access to this invisible realm, the heavenly places made real to us, not visible, but absolutely accessible because of what God has done in Christ. So, Paul is going to continue. He's going to talk about all these specific blessings that have come to us.

Before I move on, I just want to stop and I want to say, "Christian...saint...do you know the treasure that you possess? Do you know that you've been blessed by God? You've been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. Do you know the treasure that you possess?" Paul is going to continue. He's going to tell us more about it. Verse 4:

**. . .just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Vs. 3-6)**

What is this salvation? What does it mean to be saved? Well, Paul has in mind the work of the Father and what he's saying is, "Before the world was even founded, God chose you. God chose us. He chose you. You are not an afterthought. You are not an accident. God chose you, and He chose you for a purpose." Paul says His purpose is to make a people holy and blameless before Him. Now, ultimately, our holiness, our blamelessness, is found in Christ, but there is also this element that God is working us towards holiness in Him as well. There's this sanctification process, becoming more and more like God, as God works in us to bring about His purpose in us. We were chosen and chosen for a purpose. Paul says: **In love He predestined us**. This idea of predestination is a complex one. A lot of ink has been spilled over the years with people writing and trying to figure this out. A lot of arguments have taken place. A lot of divisions have occurred. Churches have split over this kind of thing, just trying to figure out, "How is it true that God chooses but also that we have responsibility, and that there is this thing called free will? How do we work those two things out?"

Perhaps you've wrestled with that yourself. I know I have. I can tell you I have spent countless hours debating this very topic. I went to a Christian college, and that's kind of what you do, or at least that's what my friends and I did. Our first few years at this Christian college, we'd go to our dinner; we'd go to the cafeteria, and we just started debating this. I had friends that were on both ends of the spectrum, some that were like, "It's all us," and some that were like, "It's all God." We were just trying to figure that out. And I will tell you, there was one evening we came this close to solving this thing, but they closed the cafeteria, and we just had to leave it. *(laughter)* People have been trying to figure this out for two millennia and some people have made great inroads. And I will just tell you, of all the things we could spend time thinking about, there is great value in trying to just consider the deep things of God. There's great value in that. But what I've found, as I've gotten older, is I have just become a little more comfortable with living in this tension, to believe that it's absolutely true. Somehow, in God's wisdom and His providence, He has chosen me, and somehow, it's absolutely true that I had to take a step of faith. There's a responsibility that I have. And somehow, those two things, even though they feel like they're in tension to me, the Bible affirms they are both true, and I've become more comfortable with that over the years. That's something you wrestle with. I think that's a good place to consider and wrestle with, but I do think, as we open up Ephesians, it's important for us to remember, I don't think Paul is inviting us to a philosophical debate. What Paul is inviting us to is overwhelming praise. The God of the universe selected you. He chose you for His team. He wanted to be with you. He came in, Paul says, **In love He predestined us to adoption as sons and daughters**. He said, "I want you to be a part of My family. Come be with me. Come into my house." And Paul is just astounded. He's saying, "How amazing is this!" And someone might say, "Well, but Paul, how does that all work?" Oh, hold on. How amazing is what God has done. He chose you. Do you know that? Do you know the treasure that you have, that in Christ, God chose you. He adopted you to be His son, His daughter,

that you might be with Him, holy and blameless, that He might also bring you up, mature you in your faith. Do you know the treasure you possess?

As Paul continues, he's going to turn to the work, specifically of Jesus, as he thinks about what He did, what God did, through the beloved, through the Son, through Jesus Christ. Verse 7:

**In Him [that is in Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us. (Vs. 7-8a)**

I just love that word *lavished*. **He lavished on us.** God saved us. He redeemed us. He brought us out of bondage to sin and to death. There's certainly a kind of imagery of God redeeming His people out of Egypt, making them His own, delivering them. And in Christ, if you are in Christ, God has done that for you. He's redeemed you, forgave you for your trespasses, did all of that by the blood of the cross. None of it is of your own doing, none of it of your own merit. It's purely that, on the cross, Jesus did what we could never do, and because, of that, we have been pulled out of slavery into a life of freedom and forgiveness that's only available through Him. It's amazing what God has done. Paul says He did it **according to the riches of His grace**, not *from* the riches of His grace, but according *to*, kind of in proportion to. God has so much grace, and because He has so much grace, He just lavished it on us. We should all use that word this week. Let's find a way to use the word *lavish* this week. God is so rich in grace. He doesn't have meager amounts of grace. He doesn't have little bits of grace. He's not in danger of running out of grace. Grace is just what God Himself, giving of Himself, doing what only He can do, bringing about what only He can bring about, by His energy, by His power. And He is infinite. He has endless amounts of grace and, from His plenty, from His fullness of grace, He lavished it on us...just poured it all over us.

As I was thinking about it this week, I thought about those yogurt places. You know, where you go, and they tell you, "Hey, you just pay at the end. It's just whatever it weighs." So I went there the first time—I'd never done it before—and I just...I lavished it, right? "Just pile it up...scoops and scoops!" I got like this \$22 cup of yogurt. (*laughter*) Lavished! Lavished it upon us! That's what God did. He did that for you; He lavished His grace upon you. As he continues in verse 8, he's going to highlight just the wonder of what God is doing and has done in Christ, and what God's plan is. At the end of verse 8, he says:

**In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of times, *that is*, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. (8b-10a)**

Now there's a lot of complexity in that sentence, but what Paul is saying is he's talking about God's plan. That's what **administration** means, kind of how God planned things out. And he's saying, **In all wisdom and insight**, God has chosen to make known to us **the mystery of His will**, the mystery of His plan. Mystery is a word that we use sometimes to talk about how something is confusing. We say, "Oh, it's a mystery; you know, God's mind is higher than our mind," and that is true. But

when the New Testament authors use this word *mystery*, they have something very specific in mind. Mystery in the New Testament means this: There has been something that has been secret, something that has been hidden for ages, and now, at the fullness of time, God has revealed it. He has made it known. What was once hidden is no longer hidden. It is now known in its fullness. And what Paul is saying is that God has done just that for His people. He's shown His people, those who are His, what He is up to in Christ. Here's His plan. He is working everything out. Everything is leading, is being woven together, is working itself out according to His wisdom, according to His plan, so that all of it will culminate in Jesus Christ being glorified and magnified. Jesus is the pinnacle that God is moving everything towards. Everything will be *summed up* in Christ. That word summed up is a mathematical word. You know, you have an equation, and there's all these kinds of numerals, and then you get to the answer—the solution—the final result. What Paul is saying is the final result of everything—what God is working everything towards—is summing everything up in Jesus: the Fulcrum, the Pinnacle, the Capstone of everything! God has a plan, and you are a part of that plan. His plan is moving forward, and He is moving history. And the place that all of history is aiming is to glorify Jesus Christ, to sum up everything in Him. And we get to know it. The mystery has been made known to us. But more than that, we get to experience it ourselves. We are beneficiaries of Jesus' power, His presence, His rule, His reign. God has a plan, and you're a part of it. Do you know the treasure that you possess? Do you know what God has revealed to you in Christ, that you've been redeemed by His blood? Your trespasses have been forgiven. God has done all of this according to His grace that He's just lavished upon you. God has made known His will to you who are in Christ. Do you know the treasure that you possess?

As it continues at the end of verse 10 into verse 11, Paul is going to walk a bit through some of the history of God's plan, kind of how this has unfolded. So, he says at the end of 10:

**In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.** (Vs. 10b-12)

God has a plan. He is unfolding it. He includes you in it. All of it is aimed at magnifying Jesus Christ, summing up all things in Him. And as Paul kind of goes into His plan, he is just highlighting how God's plan started with the Jewish people. God worked with Israel, the children of Abraham. And when Jesus came onto the earth, and He was doing His ministry during those three years, His ministry was focused on the children of Israel. Working in Jerusalem and Galilee and around Judea, bringing this new message, “The Messiah has arrived,” to the people of Israel. But God's intent was always to expand that work, to expand the glory of what He was doing through Jesus Christ to everyone, to the Gentile world, which is everyone who is not Jewish. God had a plan. He called Paul to be caught up in that plan to magnify Jesus Christ by spreading His name and this gift of salvation to the Gentile world. But we have to understand what Paul is highlighting. There is an order; there is a chronology. And what God did, began with the Jewish people. He came; He ministered to them. And Paul is saying, “We, who were the first to hope in Christ, were to the praise of His glory. God—fulfilling His promise to the Jewish people—all the leaders in Jerusalem

of the early church, they were all, for the most part, Jewish. God was working in and among those people.

But then He said, “Now go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, the Gentile world.” That's exactly what God has done. He hasn't moved past the Jewish people, but He said, “Now to the whole world, ‘Come into the family.’” He can expand His family, including everyone that believes. And so that is what Paul moves on to, people just like you and me. We are Gentiles, most of us. There might be some people that are of Jewish heritage, but we are from the nations. And the Ephesian people, themselves, were Gentiles, and that's who made up this church. So, after naming how God's word began, Paul concludes his thought here in this opening section by turning his attention to the blessings that God is offering all people through faith in Jesus. Verse 13:

**In Him, you also, after listening to the message of the truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory. (Vs. 13-14)**

Those who were first to believe, were **to the praise of His glory**. And now, as this work expands to the Gentile world, it is to the praise of God's glory. God is working out a plan, and part of His plan is that a people will be His. He will redeem them for Himself, a people who are His own possession. Paul is saying that work has expanded even unto the Gentiles. To you, Ephesians, God has poured forth blessing. The names that God gave this blessing, which was this further blessing, just another thing added on, is that the Holy Spirit, God Himself, came to dwell in those who placed their faith in Jesus Christ. He called the Holy Spirit a **seal**. A seal is like a brand or a stamp or kind of a mark that would mark ownership of the thing sealed. A seal marks ownership, like a signet ring that someone might stamp a letter with or put a mark on. And what that does is, it says this is who this thing or this person belongs to. And what Paul is saying is that you have been sealed in the Holy Spirit, which means that your identity is now that you are in Christ. That is who you are. But he also explains whose you are. You are God's; you are God's possession. He has put His seal on you. He has given you His Spirit. He will never remove that seal. No one can take that seal away from you. You are God's. He also continues, and he says, The Holy Spirit is a **pledge**. To seal is also a pledge, like a down payment, a first installment, a first installment guaranteeing a future inheritance, that is rich beyond our comprehension. A first installment. God has come, and He's given this first blessing. But what that first blessing promises is that there is more to come. There's more coming down the road. As hard as it is to even fathom what God has given us in Christ, is a guarantee that the world to come and the blessings to come and the inheritance to come, is beyond comprehension. And the Holy Spirit guarantees that that is coming. God is going to redeem a people for His own possession, all of it to the praise of His glory.

So as we continue, “Do you know? Do you know the treasure that you possess? Do you know that in Christ, you have been granted God's very Holy Spirit, a seal marking you as His? You belong to no one else.” That seal is a pledge of things to come. God has given of Himself to you but there is more. Somehow, there is more. The infinite God is going to give us more and more of Himself



that is to come. Do you know the treasure that you possess? How great is this salvation! How great is the salvation that has come to us through God, through Christ Jesus, through His death on the cross. What an amazing salvation He has brought to us! If we spend a lifetime thinking about it, we will never understand the depths. We'll never understand the breadth of it, all of it so unimaginable, so overwhelmingly good that Paul is just pouring forth...gushing forth praise towards God. We'll never understand it in its fullness. It's just too good. Oh, but we can grow in understanding it. We can understand it a little bit more. We can come to appreciate it a little bit more. And as we do that, we can turn our lives in praise towards Him, walking around as living, breathing, constantly praising God worshipers of the One who has brought this great salvation to you and to me.

Where do we begin? Well, Paul repeated a few times *hearing* and *believing*. If you have never placed your faith in Jesus Christ, *hear* and *believe* that you might come into the family of God. Place your faith in Him and His work on the cross so that, today, you might become His...sealed by His Spirit...part of His eternal family...a saint. If you have placed your faith in Jesus, then let your life be one of praise as we dwell on these things. We serve an incredible God that has come to us, a God that saves. And as we reflect on these things—just how great a salvation we have—that we are chosen, that we are redeemed, that we are sealed, that we are blessed with every spiritual blessing, may we become people who walk around praising God, living lives of praise. Would that it be so for us! Would that we be people that, when others talk about us, they would say, “These are people who are living, breathing, constant worshipers, because they serve a God that is worthy of praise.” Let's turn to Him now and praise Him for all that He has done.

*Our Father, we do bless Your name. We praise Your name. You have poured out blessing upon us. Lord, we can't even fathom the depth of the blessing You have given us in Christ. Oh, Lord, we ask that You would help us understand it a bit more. Help us to cherish it. Help us to just be awed in wonder at it, that we might be people who are more and more enlivened by the salvation that You brought to us. May the life You've offered us that begins now and will go on forever, show that we might be people that live to the praise of Your glory. Lord, we thank You that we can bring these things to You, only because of your Son and the work that He accomplished on our behalf. And so we pray these things in His name, Amen.*

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## Introduction

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This week marks the start of a new session of Life Groups, and the start of a new sermon series on the book of Ephesians. **We suggest you go to the Bible Project website and watch an overview video for the book of Ephesians.** (<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/ephesians/>). This will give you a bit of history about the Ephesians church and help you understand how the whole letter fits together.

**To think through the main ideas in the sermon and prepare for your discussion together, we invite you to look over all the questions on the following pages and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group. Due to preferences over a wide range of groups, we do not expect you will cover every question each week.**

## Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

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### **For Life Groups that are meeting for the first time:**

- 1) Go around the circle and ask everyone to answer these “H” questions.

**Hello** - Tell us a little bit about yourself.

**History** - What brought you to LBC/Life Group?

**Hobby** - What do you enjoy doing?

**Happy** - What is a place, activity or person that is your happy place?

### **For Life Groups that are reconnecting:**

If you have a couple of new members in your group, you might want to have everyone answer the questions above before continuing with the questions below.

- 1) What is happening in your life/family right now?
- 2) How did God work in your life this summer?

## Getting Started

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Transition into group discussion.

- 1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
  - a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
  - b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives
  - c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you
- 2) Choose someone to read the passage aloud for the group.

## Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

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- 1) Paul starts his letter by calling his readers saints. (*Ephesians 1:1*) **Do you consider yourself a saint? Why or why not?**

*Nine times in this brief letter, Paul addresses his readers as saints (Eph. 1:1, 15, 18; 2:19; 3:8, 18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18). The word saint is simply one of the many terms used in the New Testament to describe “one who has trusted Jesus Christ as Savior.” The word saint means “one who has been set apart.” It is related to the word sanctified, which means “set apart.” When the sinner trusts Christ as his Savior, he is taken out of “the world” and placed “in Christ.” The believer is in the world physically, but not of the world spiritually (John 17:14-16). Like a scuba diver, he exists in an alien environment because he possesses special equipment—in this case, the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. - Bible Exposition Commentary – NT*

**How does this change your view of yourself?**

- 2) In *Ephesians 1:3* Paul discusses the idea of blessing. **When you think of blessing, what do you normally think of?**

**What is the framework Paul is using to describe the idea of blessing?**

**How might this change the way you approach the blessings in your life?**

- 3) In *Ephesians 1:4-5* Paul talks about God choosing and predestining the Ephesians (or us). Quite a bit of theological debate surrounds the words “predestined” and “chose”. **Do you think Paul’s intention here is to spark theological debate? If so, explain your answer? If not, then why does Paul bring up the idea of God’s choosing and predestining?**

It can be challenging to try to understand how God’s sovereignty (choosing/predestining) and our free will work together. Both have foundations in the scriptures, and it is not possible to make them fit together perfectly like a puzzle. God does not explain this to us, He leaves it as a mystery. **Why does God leave mystery in His story/His relationship with us?**

- 4) In *Ephesians 1:13-14* Paul uses two images to describe our relationship to Christ in the Holy Spirit: We are “sealed” in Christ by the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit is a “pledge” (or down payment) of our inheritance. **What do you think Paul is trying to convey by each of these images?**

**Take a moment to list all of what the Father has given us or done for us “through/in Christ”.**

**If you really believed you were chosen and predestined to adoption and possess all of the things that are yours “in Christ”, according to this passage, how would it change the way you live your daily life?**

## Personal Spiritual Exercises

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Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts. **Next week in Life Group, take a few moments to share how the Lord may have used this exercise in your life.**

**Scripture Focus:** Each morning read through Ephesians 1:1-14. On each day, take a moment to write down one of the blessings “in Christ” that sticks out to you and journal response to this blessing.

**Prayer Focus:** As you set out to pray, think about this statement from L. L. Letgers. *“If you can run over in your mind and find one single blessing with which God might bless us today, with which He has not already blessed us, then what He told Paul is not true at all, because He said, ‘God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing...’ It is all done. The great pity of it is that we are saying, ‘O God bless us—bless us in this, bless us in that! And it is all done—He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies. It is our place to believe and receive.’”* **How does this change the way you pray?**

## Prayer (Suggested time: 20 min)

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A significant part of “coming together” is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say “Amen” aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the message, working through the above questions or the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?