

EPHESIANS

blessed to be a blessing

WEEK ONE

Ephesians 1.1-3

What does the word 'blessing' mean to you? Does it conjure up images of fine new clothes, well-manicured lawns, surround sound, comfortable living, a country that can defend itself mightily against its enemy and rule the land? Unfortunately, I fear that the use of the word in our modern culture is far removed from the meaning intended in biblical passages like we read today. People who look 'blessed' on the outside can still be experiencing chaos on the inside. Today's passage calls us to think way bigger, to think in terms of the *spiritual* blessings of redemption and reconciliation available through Jesus Christ and by which we participate through the work of the Holy Spirit. Another way to think of them is as Holy Spiritual blessings. These blessings empower us to align ourselves rightly with God, which very significantly allows us to experience an internal peace that deeply satisfies. This right alignment also enables us to move towards harmony in our human relationships. What does it do to us to know that the One who is worthy of blessing holds nothing back from us? Know that every spiritual blessing that is ever possible in Christ has been given to us. Reflect today on what real, internal blessing could mean in your life?

Ephesians 1.4-6

Do you remember being in P.E. class in elementary school when teams were formed? This may be a particular fond memory for you or one filled with anxiety. The anticipation of who would be chosen first or second was almost too much to bear; but definitely not as bad as who would be chosen *last!* Our passage today tells us that, as believers, we have all been hand-picked by God from before the creation of the world, selected first to be a part of His family as sons and daughters. This is our destiny. And, He selected us not because of any great skills we possessed but solely out of His overflowing love which He gives, free-of-charge. This love is the force which draws us to the center and binds us together. And significantly, we are reminded three times in this short passage that it is entirely through Jesus Christ that this union of believers is accomplished. Jesus, then, is the face of God's grace to us. How will you live and think differently knowing that you have been chosen by our Holy God in the first-round for the team?

Ephesians 1.7-10

Sometimes I make a big deal out of other people's missteps and not-such-a-big-deal out of my own. Sin can cause a person to have "blind spots" or minimize the extent of it. If seen in its true light, sin gets in the way of a whole, thriving relationship with God and others. And, while our missteps or the deeper, more damaging areas of our sinful nature (think anger, jealousy, dishonesty, lust, pride, to name a few) can be difficult to even see or overcome, as believers in Christ, we can be confident that it is God's will that we live in the redemption that He enacted for this very purpose. While there is no way that we can overcome these darker areas of our human nature all alone, God is not surprised by them nor does he shame us for them. In fact, it is quite the opposite. If you've ever come face-to-face with the negative aspects of your sinful nature, take heart....God lavishly covers our missteps with the wealth of his grace, that is, the forgiveness enacted through Christ. And, this is enduring grace; whatever we have done or will do is let go in an effort to restore and heal what has been broken. We can only take hold of the enormity of the power behind this grace of forgiveness when we understand the enormity of the damage our sin causes. But do not be discouraged: this process of recognizing our sin with greater clarity can draw us closer to Christ by helping us see our dire need for Him.

Ephesians 1.11-14

Have you ever read Scripture and realized that something in your life has played out just like what is written? We will not see exact parity with everything in Scripture on this side of heaven, and we may even observe situations that *seem* to contradict it. But as you saturate yourself more and more in God's word, you may find that this phenomenon of similarity happens more often. This is evidence, a hint, that there is a plan being worked out, a divine plan directed by divine wisdom. Our passage today tells us that God is "working out *everything* in conformity with the purpose of his will." This has been happening since before we came onto the scene, and it is continuing today. Isn't it very comforting to know that Someone bigger than us is entirely involved and has a perfect master plan for how everything is going to shake out? And, it gets better: God calls us His very own, approved and sealed with the promise of the Holy Spirit upon our hearing and believing the truth of Christ. We are His heirs, which means that we have more of His awesomeness waiting for us. This passage tells us twice that these are all reasons to get excited and praise His Holy Name!

Ephesians 1.15-20

Have you recently had an "aha" moment that helped you grasp something with greater clarity? Maybe you realized a positive quality in someone that you weren't aware of before. Or maybe you realized something about yourself that was interfering with living a healthier life or having a better relationship with someone. These can be powerful moments of realization because they can compel us to live differently, greatly help us to cope with something in our life, or improve how we approach a particular relationship.

In this passage, Paul's fervent prayers consist of three significant areas for believers, and all of them involve being given a deeper understanding of some aspect of our relationship with God. The first area is that we would know God better. This sounds simplistic, but it has meaningful implications. Paul understands that greater love for God will come only when we have a more personal, intimate knowledge of Him. The second area that Paul prays for is that believers would come to understand more deeply the hope and privilege we have in being God's prized possession. Believers are called God's inheritance because we are fully loved and desired and are a people whom He has been pursuing from the very beginning. The third and equally vital area Paul prays for is that we would come to know and, by implication, *live into* the great power that has been made available to us. Absolutely nothing exceeds this power source that we have been given. It is the very same power that raised Christ from the dead.

This passage teaches us that we cannot generate any of this understanding on our own because it is well-beyond human wisdom. I have struggled to find words to describe it here! So, I pray, too, that God would give us all the Spirit of wisdom and revelation which enables us to know Him more deeply at our core and the amazing power and hope to which He has called us.