

EPHESIANS

blessed to be a blessing

WEEK FOUR

Ephesians 3.1-2

It is freeing to know that if you are in Christ, then God has given you a specific calling for your life. For Paul, this calling was to be an ambassador for Christ to the Gentiles (the non-Jewish population) of his time, proclaiming the good news of once-and-for-all forgiveness and healing and togetherness. Because of God's plan (which we studied in Ephesians 2) to build a firm foundation for the Church to grow and to unite into one inseparable family Jews and Gentiles, Paul was given his calling. We, too, have been given a calling – a central purpose in life. This central purpose also aligns with God's plan to build the Church and bring reconciliation to all (2 Corinthians 5.17-20). Our calling will also work double-duty by satisfying the greatest commandment: to love God and love people (Matthew 22.36-39, cross-check Exodus 20.1-17). So, by discovering and fulfilling our calling, we are also living out the top-priorities of God. This is probably why living out our calling can be the most satisfying thing we do, far above any other pleasure this world can offer.

Another exciting part of our calling is that God has shaped it perfectly to our giftings, passion, and personal style in which He has created us. This means that we will be enthusiastic and passionate about our niche of calling because it is a perfect fit with how we've been designed. Our calling is something that can keep us talking until late hours of the night. Our calling also focuses our lives; it helps us prioritize amongst the insane number of choices, opportunities, and urgencies that try to suck us in and away from the important things. Calling will not always be easy; the word 'passion' implies that some agony will be involved. But there is a power which transcends us and a satisfaction that comes that makes us certain that we are tracking with God. If your area of calling is fuzzy right now, pray that God will enlighten you and help you discover it. Also, ask another leader at The Creek to direct you to resources that will help you figure it out. In the words of Os Guinness in his book, *The Call*: "Do you want to accept a challenge that will be the integrating dynamic of your whole life? One that will engage your loftiest thoughts, your most dedicated exertions, your deepest emotions, all your abilities and resources, to the last step you take and the last breath you breathe? Listen to Jesus of Nazareth; answer his call." (p35)

Ephesians 3.3-6

Some of us were mystery novel junkies growing up: Hardy Boys, Nancy Drew, and probably the occasional Scooby-Doo mystery kept us reading for hours. Some of our tastes may have matured with age, but sometimes we may find ourselves raiding our kids' bookshelves for a quick fix! Most of us probably have a love-hate relationship with suspenseful dramas because, if the author has done his or her job well, it feels as if we have become part of the drama ourselves. We empathize greatly with the characters' turmoil and confusion as the plot builds, hoping (and stressing!) all the while that there would be some relief to their situation. The intrigue and anticipation is enough to make us nearly burst until the author finally reveals how exactly the protagonists will be delivered from their intense, life-threatening situation. And, sometimes this keeps us squirming until the bitter end.

A story is unfolding in the cosmic drama of God's plan of salvation. The drama transcends us...but it also includes us. The protagonist is God, and humans are the proud, highly independent creatures who can create turmoil and confusion with their misaligned lives. God has hard-wired us, however, to desire Him and community. And, everything we read in the Old Testament – the story, the people, and the prophecies - are all pointing to a time when The Hero would finally be revealed to gather an inclusive community, one that heals the heartbreak of loneliness and estrangement. Relief and deliverance have swept in, just in the nick-of-time. The Author has revealed the mystery that humanity has been desperately needing....the mystery that is Christ. No longer is anyone estranged from God and His community. It is here where we find our meaning and purpose for existence. Our future is secure in this community if we love the Risen Christ. We belong, and He is calling for our participation. And, this participation might just involve some frightful intrigue and heart-pounding anticipation. So, stay tuned to what Christ is doing in you and in the world today, and hope in all that He will do tomorrow to bring reconciliation...because, the drama is still unfolding.

Ephesians word study

Word studies can help us by deepening our understanding of the meaning of words. This applies especially well to big, "Christian" words like r-e-c-o-n-c-i-l-i-a-t-i-o-n. And, since we've been talking a lot about this specific word, and it is one of the major themes of Ephesians to this point, it is fitting that we flesh it out a little more.

In Ephesians, Paul is speaking about how Christ's death rescued everyone and everything from the destructive separation between God and His creation. The work of grace has been done; we have only to receive it into our hearts and lives. The net result of this salvific act is the flattening of any forces that would attempt to cause a wall of separation between God and people and between each other (e.g., any conflict, disturbance, hatred). Think of the nails on the cross as restoration hardware! We can now say that we have been reconciled – restored to close relationship with God, and He is our lifeline. Accounts have been settled once-and-for-all. Forgiveness occurred at the time of Christ's death, and the results continue on. Healing, peace, and harmony now comprise Christ's main goal for all of creation, and He is masterminding everything to that end. Like two different voices coming together to create a melodious sound, neither one competing against each other but complimenting each other. The two are said to be resonating, which makes them sound as one voice. The strength and health of each voice is used synergistically to create a captivating sound that would be impossible otherwise.

There is a unifying, harmonizing force at work now. Do we see it? Are we praying to experience it? Does our pride or prejudice hinder it? Do we see others who are different that ourselves as one of the voices being melded into the chorus? Pray today that the personal relationships in our home, in our diverse communities, at our place of work, and in our church would heal and reflect the organic harmony that Christ is conducting. This unity and love can be a captivating force to onlookers.

Ephesians 3.7-11

Some people (and you know who you are) like to read the last chapter of a book to see how things are going to end. This way, they can chart the progress of all the dips and turns that the story takes on its way to that end goal. Likewise, we do not know how or when complete fulfillment of the Kingdom of God will occur, but we do know that God is in the process of bringing everything into existence into completeness in Christ (Ephesians 1.9-10). This is His goal.

We have in our passage today an invaluable nugget of truth about the mission and purpose of the Church: "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, according to His eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord." (vv 10-11) God's divine reign is already a present reality, and the Church is the means by which God's wise plan is on display to the powers that are against Him. The Church is a tangible reminder to these forces that God rules, and their powers have been defeated. No longer do their powers hold control over people to keep them from being united in Christ's body in a healing, saving relationship.

The Church is also a promise that there is more of His awesome overcoming power ahead. We, the Church, are marching toward this goal of completeness. We have merely a taste of God's goodness right now, and complete and perfect fellowship in God's community awaits us. And, like knowing what will happen at the end of a book, knowing the goal can help the Church (and the people who make it up) focus attention on what God is doing today to this end. Let us not be frivolous about the Church, then, nor our role in it. May we revere the Church, despite the human flaws, and may we serve God and neighbor wholeheartedly with the gifts and passions He has given us, and let God show those powers who's Boss!

Ephesians 3.14-19

It could be said that the Church is living with the effects of an 'Enlightenment' hangover. The Age of Enlightenment was a social and intellectual revolution that began in the mid 17th Century and picked up steam in the 18th Century. The main emphasis for this time period was 'reason' and 'human knowledge;' if the human mind could prove something by reason, then it must be true. On the other hand, if something could not be proven by reason, then it was relegated to the realm of error. This may be an oversimplified description, but it gives you the gist. According to philosophers, scientists, and other intellectuals, the human mind was finally being set free from ignorance, which they came to believe typified humanity up until this point. In some instances, the Church got sucked into this sphere, and while it is admirable that theologians were engaging their culture in dialogue to such an extent, some began to defend the faith based on reason alone. Some of the effects of this 'hangover,' then, are that in many instances the Christian faith became more individualistic, intellectual, and private.

Reason can be a road block for some people grappling to understand and receive truths about Christ. While there is overwhelming evidence* to support biblical truths, knowing God by heart and not by mind is the core of faith. Paul describes a multidimensional love that jumps off the page, so-to-speak. This knowledge cannot be gotten from a book or by intellectual discussions nor can it even be proven with physical evidence. This faith and love that is held by all the saints through time, and in whom we join as one family, have touched our "inner being" by way of the Spirit of Christ, and our lives will never be the same. The width and length and height and depth of this love are at times indescribable and many times immeasurable except by witnessing real life change as an effect of it. The power of this love is the headwaters for what is done by the saints to further God's mission for the Church. It is an undeniable power, yet it is a love that surpasses knowledge. Pray today that the Spirit of Christ would touch you deeply and you would receive this love that goes well beyond human reason.

Sources: Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, and a bit of Wikipedia, of course.

* From Pastor Kurt's sermon on Sept 11, 2011: The Scriptures we have now in print are nearly identical to the originals, no archaeological findings have ever contradicted a direct biblical reference, and over 300 prophecies about Jesus alone have been fulfilled – a near statistically impossibility.