

WEEK 1

MADE **ALIVE**

The Book of Ephesians



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WEEK 1
JANUARY 8, 2024



CHURCH IN THE SQUARE

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EVERY DAY ...

... A **PASSAGE** TO READ,

... SOME **COMMENTS** TO CONSIDER,

... THREE **QUESTIONS** TO ASK,

... A **PRAYER** TO PRAY.



WEEK 1

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DAY 1

A FRESH WORLD BLOOMS

First read Ephesians 1:1-2.

When John Mackay, the third president of Princeton Theological Seminary, first read the book of Ephesians nothing less than a fresh world bloomed before his eyes. “Everything was new,” he later wrote, “I had a new outlook, new experiences, new attitudes to other people. I loved God. Jesus Christ became the centre of everything ... I had been ‘quickened’; I was really alive” (*God’s Order*, 24). He was made new. This is precisely Paul’s apostolic aim as he writes to a group of Christians in the first-century city of Ephesus.

The first Christians in Ephesus were “**saints ... faithful in Christ Jesus**” (v.1). While this is a theological reality for all followers of Jesus, Paul is also telling us something unique about the Ephesians’ resilience. After all, these are urban people learning to navigate the pressures and complexities of life in a busy commercial port city steeped in cultic worship of deities like Diana (see Acts 19:23–41). New life with Jesus meant resisting the metropolitan urge to build security and meaning through achievement, money, and work. But it also meant avoiding the trap of religion—finding significance and salvation through personal morality.

At every turn, the book of Ephesians will encourage us to do the same. We’ll be compelled to interrogate the impulse to follow “**the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air**” and instead surrender to the “**grace ... and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**” (2:1, 1:2). Our effort—be it secular or sacred—is not the way to renewal. Only our Heavenly Father blooms a fresh world of lasting hope, meaning, and safety in us (see 2:4-5). Because only the Eternal Son has exposed the fraudulent powers of the world and put the old life to death.



DAY 1

A FRESH WORLD BLOOMS

1. What is grace? What is peace? How does God give us both?
2. What people or things do you trust to give you hope, meaning, and safety? Why are those damaging?
3. How does Christ bring new life through the cross and resurrection? What's it look like to believe this daily?

Heavenly Father ...

It's easy to trust in myself and the powers of this world to give me the life I'm looking for. Forgive me. Heal me. Help me to find life in you alone.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.



DAY 2

LOVE SHAPES OUR IDENTITY

First read Ephesians 1:3-6.

We often think about God's unconditional love as a love that endures even when we make mistakes and sin. He always forgives us, *right?* While that's true, it's even better than that. The Heavenly Father's love doesn't simply persist despite conditions. His love also precedes all conditions. God loves you no matter what you do because God loved you before you did anything.

Fred Rogers knew this kind of love was transformational. "Unconditional love," he said, "is the most powerful tool in a parent's toolkit, shaping and molding a child's sense of self" (*The World According to Mister Rogers*). Love shapes our identity. And so, since the Father **"chose us in him before the foundation of the world"** we know who we are (v.4).

But notice ... this paternal affection comes through Christ. We are blessed **"in Christ"** (v.3). We are adopted **"through Jesus Christ"** (v.5). We are blessed **"in the Beloved"** (v.6). Unconditional love is not only a matter of when but how. For sinners to become children, the only Son of God had to be treated like a sinner (see 2 Corinthians 5:21). Through his substitutionary death, any and every condition that could ever separate us from the Father's love has been rendered powerless (see Romans 8:31-39).

You see, you are loved unconditionally because the Father's love preceded all conditions (that's the when). And you are loved through Christ (that's the how). In other words, his love is not based on our performance but rather on his perfect Son.

That's who we are.

We are the Father's loved children.



DAY 2

LOVE SHAPES OUR IDENTITY

1. What does it mean to be a child of the Heavenly Father?
2. How does remembering you are blessed, chosen, and loved by the Father change your view of yourself? How ought it change what you do and what you care about?
3. Why was Jesus' death necessary to make us children of God?

Heavenly Father ...

Thank you. Thank you for loving me first. Thank you for loving me before all conditions. Thank you for loving me no matter the conditions. Thank you for loving me through your Son.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.



DAY 3

DIVERSITY WITHOUT DIVISION

First read Ephesians 1:7-10.

One of the fundamental values of the Bible is diversity without division. God has made **“known to us the mystery of his will”** (v.8). That mystery “is the inclusion of Gentiles in God’s new society on equal terms with Jews” (Stott, 41). He has united different peoples into a single family. Seeing all kinds of people in genuine fellowship is a signpost of God’s ultimate vision **“to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth”** (v.10, see Revelation 21:1-5).

This begs the question, *then why does so much division persist in the Church?* It’s a fair question. American Christians are divided over theology, race, borders, gender, politics, money, and abortion—just to name a few. Our differences rarely produce curiosity, let alone unity. More often they lead to fractured communities and new denominations.

What’s the hope?

Well, it’s important to remember, Jesus doesn’t unite Jews with Gentiles by making them less Jewish. Nor do Gentiles find harmony with Jews by downplaying their various perspectives, cultures, and ethnicities. After all, **“the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”** (Romans 14:17). Communion is not achieved by dismissing diversity. Christ’s plan is to weave together this human tapestry **“through his blood”** (v.7). That is, through his redemptive work. We are made one by becoming more like Christ, not more like each other. To be sure, when we become more like Christ we’ll need to leave certain things behind. But not because they are different, but rather because they are not like him.



DAY 3

DIVERSITY WITHOUT DIVISION

1. What does God's value for diversity without division reveal about his heart?
2. What makes you want to divide from a brother or sister or community? What do you think is right to divide over?
3. How does Jesus' promise to unite all things bring you comfort? How does it correct or challenge you?

Heavenly Father ...

Forgive us for all the ways we divide over differences. It's hard to stay together. It's hard to trust you. Forgive me for believing the lie that life would be better if everyone were more like me. In truth, I ache for everyone to be like you--myself included. Make my community more like Jesus. Make me more like Jesus.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.



DAY 4

OUR SHARED INHERITANCE

First read Ephesians 1:11-12.

One of the primary marks of a family, especially in the ancient world, is a shared inheritance. As Paul continues to emphasize the value of diversity without division, he explains that Jewish and Gentile believers share in Christ's inheritance. However, each group has unique hangups about this spiritual reality. So Paul addresses them separately—first he'll talk to Jews (notice the "we" in v.11-12), then he'll talk to Gentiles (notice the "you" in v.13-14).

Righteousness and future hope are possessions of the Heavenly Father's. Paul tells his Jewish readers they've **"obtained an inheritance"** (v.11a). This reward is bestowed upon them because they've been **"predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will"** (v.11). Initially this would have been difficult for them to hear. Like many of us, they were in the habit of working to secure their own futures through righteousness rituals. And the very idea of inheritance exposes this religious folly.

You see, an inheritance is only executed upon death. If there's no death, there's no reward. The possessions remain with the original owner. What Paul is saying then is that through the death of Christ the trove of the Father's righteousness and hope is bestowed upon us—Christ's spiritual beneficiaries. It's not rewarded to us because of our habits or hustle, but exclusively because our names are written in the will.



DAY 4
OUR SHARED
INHERITANCE

1. What does the fact that the Father has a will and an inheritance to offer us reveal about his character?
2. In what ways are you prone to secure your own future?
3. How does the death of Christ ensure we have righteousness and future hope?

Heavenly Father ...

Help me to rest in the gracious gift of your inheritance today.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.



DAY 5

SECURITY BRINGS JOY

First read Ephesians 1:13-14.

Having explained to his Jewish readers their inheritance is a gift, Paul now tells his Gentile readers they're secure in the same promise. However, they face a different obstacle than their more religiously inclined brothers and sisters. While many Jewish people were prone to distrust God's grace, non-Jewish people struggled more with God's faithfulness. And so Paul emphasizes that they're **"sealed with the promised Holy Spirit"** (v.13). He wants them to rest in the power and presence of the third member of the Trinity **"who is the guarantee of our inheritance"** (v.14).

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones believed this assurance was the key to happiness. When joy is absent from our lives it's at least in part because of "our failure to realize what is meant by God's sealing of His children by 'that Holy Spirit of Promise'" (Lloyd-Jones, 244). He's saying that security brings joy. Knowing the Spirit is with us reminds us that our future is written, our salvation is sure, and our well-being is **"hidden with Christ"** (Colossians 3:3). His presence loosens the grip fear ... and it's fear that steals our joy.

So, what's this look like on a daily basis?

Well, the Spirit is our Helper. He drives fear away by reminding us of all that Jesus said (see John 14:26). When fear tells us our future must be secured everyday by being patient parents, valuable employees, and good Christians, the Spirit reminds us that Jesus is our life (see John 14:6). When fear tells us God is not faithful, the Spirit reminds us that Jesus is with us to the end of the age (see Matthew 28:20). When fear lies to us, the Spirit tells us the truth and the truth always sets us free and brings us joy (see John 8:32).



DAY 5
LOVE SHAPES OUR
IDENTITY

1. How does God's Spirit help us?
2. What lies is fear telling you about your hope and future?
3. How does Jesus' death and resurrection provide a safety and security that nothing else can?

Heavenly Father ...

Fear tells me lies all the time. Forgive me for often believing its messages and not yours. By your Spirit point me to your Son. Minister truth to my soul. In you I'm safe, secure, and joyful.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

MADE ALIVE

The Book of Ephesians

To receive updates about this reading guide and discover more gospel resources to help you enjoy the truth and beauty of Jesus, please visit churchinthesquare.com.





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