

WEEK 3

MADE ALIVE

The Book of Ephesians



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WEEK 3
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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 3

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DAY 1

SIN BRINGS DEATH

First read Ephesians 2:1-2.

Sin has deadly consequences. Like when we lie. Each deception, wittingly or unwittingly, erodes the bond of friendship and family—lying kills trust. But sin also darkens our souls. Paul says, **“you were dead in the trespasses and sin in which you once walked”** (v.1). A trespass is a step outside or away from what is right. Sin is about missing the mark. Author Frederick Buechner explains that when sin is “at work in a human life, it tends to push everything out toward the periphery. Bits and pieces go flying off until only the core is left. Eventually, bits and pieces of the core itself go flying off until, in the end, nothing at all is left” (*Wishful Thinking*). Slowly but surely, sin kills us.

God is righteous (see Isaiah 45:21). God is our standard (see 1 Peter 1:15). Therefore, every trespass steps away from his will, and every sin misses the mark of his character. The woo of **“this world ... [and] the prince of the power of the air”** draw us away from what makes us whole and healthy (v.2). You see, those “bits and pieces go flying off” because only the Lord holds us together (see Colossians 1:17). Our instinct is to collect the pieces of our lives, rethink our priorities, and work harder to stay the righteous course. But we can’t.

Sin’s curse progressively destroys. But its grip is solidified from birth because **“in Adam all die”** (1 Corinthians 15:22). Our trespasses and sins aren’t simply what we do or fail to do; they “enter into us” (Luther, 95). What theologians call original sin is the idea, not simply, that we’re born imperfect but dead, unable to save ourselves. Our healing and resurrection must come from someone whose life is unaffected by the curse that plagues us. That’s Jesus. Jesus can put us back together again, but he never fell apart.



DAY 1
SIN BRINGS
DEATH

1. What does it mean that God is our righteous standard?
2. How has sin brought death to your life?
3. How can we be confident that Jesus can bring dead things to life?

Heavenly Father ...

Sin has killed me. Sin is killing me. Graciously collect the bits and pieces of my life that sin has destroyed and bring me life again. By your Son, forgive me. By your Spirit, restore me. By your Word, help me walk in the light.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.



DAY 2

THE DESIRES OF THE BODY

First read Ephesians 2:3.

Everyone has desires. Our minds are filled with thoughts, our hearts are filled with longings, and our bodies are filled with impulses craving satisfaction. Some traditions teach us to resist our desires. The fourth-century philosopher Diogenes believed it was “the privilege of the gods to want nothing, and of godlike men to want little.” In our modern world, we’re more inclined to seek gratification. Spiritual teacher Sri Chinmoy wrote, “Desire means anxiety. This anxiety finds satisfaction only when it is able to fulfill itself through solid attachment” (*The Wisdom of Sri Chinmoy*, 3). So, which is it? Are our desires corrupt and misleading? Or pathways to happiness and fulfillment?

According to the Bible, we are “heart-soul-mind-body complexes designed for love” (*The Life We’re Looking For*, 33). Satisfying our cravings for love, peace, knowledge, or food is not only not evil, it’s human. However, like all of life and creation, our desires have been corrupted by sin. Our “natural desires have been perverted into sinful desires” (*God’s New Society*, 74). Therefore, we ought to **“take every thought captive to obey Christ,”** discerning whether or not a longing fulfilled will lead to worship and flourishing or rebellion and destruction (2 Corinthians 10:5).

When we’re dead in our sin, we don’t interrogate our desires (see v.1). Rather, we indulge **“in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind”** (v.3). We do what we feel. Paul tells the Ephesians that this only leads to wrath and brokenness. Only in Christ can we discern truth from lies, resist evil, and **“take hold of that which is truly life”** (1 Timothy 6:19). After all, Jesus faced every desire that we do ... yet, he never sinned (see Hebrews 4:15).



DAY 2

THE DESIRE OF THE BODY

1. Why do you think God cares which desires we satisfy and which we resist?
2. What desires are you feeling today? Which do you think are from the Lord? Which are corrupted by sin?
3. How does knowing that Jesus felt every desire comfort and strengthen you?

Heavenly Father ...

I don't always know if a feeling, desire, or impulse is from you or if it reflects sin's curse. I need your wisdom. I need your power. I need your love. Comfort and empower me today to obey you.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.



DAY 3

A DIVINE SET UP

First read Ephesians 2:4-7.

Paul set us up. He began by cataloging our bleak, sinful situation. We're dead (v.1). We're controlled by the world's destructive influences (v.2). We're bound up in **"the passions of the flesh"** (v.3). Then a "mighty adversative" arrests all this bad news (Stott, 79). You see? Paul set us up. He allowed the problem of sin to pile up, demonstrating the impossibility of solving that problem on our own. But God changes everything.

All that we are by sinful nature, we are no more by God's nature. **"Being rich in mercy,"** he restrains his righteous wrath (v.4). He doesn't give us what we deserve. Because of his **"great love,"** he overwhelms death and makes us **"alive together with Christ"** (v.4,5). He gives us what we don't deserve.

Human history is one big set up, too. Generations waited between the Fall and the Advent as God allowed the problem of sin to pile up, demonstrating the impossibility of solving that problem on our own. In doing so, God isn't being manipulative. Neither is Paul. The set up is meant to reveal, not conceal. From creation to the cross, God **"shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"** (Romans 5:8). That's what he's showing us: himself.

Much of this passage is dedicated to the result of our salvation. Paul is showing us all the ways our bleak situation has been undone. We were dead, now we're alive (v.5). We were controlled, now we're raised up (v.6a). We were earthbound, now we're seated in heavenly places (v.6b). But the force of the passage is centered on God. The big reveal isn't our salvation. It's our Savior. It's not simply what happens to us. It's who comes for us.



DAY 3
A DIVINE
SET UP

1. What does it mean that God is merciful? What does it mean that he is love?
2. How does reflecting on God's love and mercy transform you?
3. Why is Jesus better than what Jesus does for us?

Heavenly Father ...

Thank you for loving me so much that you used all of human history to help me see and savor your Son, Jesus Christ.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.



DAY 4

SAVED BY GRACE

First read Ephesians 2:8-9.

Over the past five hundred years of church history, few ideas loom more significant than the doctrine of salvation by grace. In 1517, Martin Luther nailed 95 statements on a church door in Germany. In doing so, the theologian sparked the Protestant Reformation. Luther aimed to recenter the Church's imagination around the idea that ***“By grace, you have been saved through faith”*** (v.8a). He was decoupling the gospel of Jesus Christ from our instinct that salvation is our ***“own doing”*** (v.8b).

Grace isn't natural to us.

Works make much more sense.

Let's think about it. Most of our lives are predicated on principles of merit. As children, we received trophies and awards because we outperformed our peers (Millennial participation ribbons aside). If we went to college, we were likely selected based on our grades and achievements—we earned it. Moreover, we secured our salaries and positions in our respective fields by working hard and paying our dues. Our world is built on works.

We struggle to separate this instinct from our relationship with God. Moralism is our “default heart condition” (Sinclair Ferguson). It's hard to imagine, let alone embrace, a life that is a ***“gift of God, not a result of works”*** (v.8c-9a). That's because we find our value in our trophies, degrees, titles, and money. Grace scares us. Because grace reshapes our identity. You see, if we're spiritual employees, then yes, meritocracy makes perfect sense. But, if we're children of a Heavenly Father, then blessings based on merit would violate his love (see 1 John 3:1). Our world may be built on works, but God's family is saved by grace.



DAY 4
SAVED BY
GRACE

1. What does God's grace teach us about his character?
2. What shapes your identity? How does grace reshape your self-concept?
3. How does Jesus' death and resurrection decouple us from our faith in works?

Heavenly Father ...

Help me to trust your grace.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.



DAY 5
SALVATION IS ABOUT
GOD

First read Ephesians 2:10.

Grace is powerfully centering. In one stroke, grace soothes sinful souls that have been wearied by the instinct to save themselves. When we realize that salvation isn't our **"own doing,"** we're empowered to rest, laying down the endless hustle to perform our way into the Father's affection (v.8b). In a second move, grace protects us from wounding ourselves further by doing whatever we please. Seeing salvation as **"a gift of God"** warms our hearts to love the Father in return (v.8c).

Grace keeps us from both self-loathing (legalism) and self-exalting (lawlessness) by centering us on God.

At first blush, we might think this verse, and perhaps the whole Bible is all about us. Paul describes Christians as a *workmanship* or piece of art; a tapestry. Notice, however, that the masterpiece belongs to God (*we are his*) and has been made by God (*created in Christ*) for God's purposes (*for good works*) according to God's plan (*prepared beforehand*).

Our salvation is for us, but it's not about us.

Salvation is all about God.



DAY 5

SALVATION IS ABOUT GOD

1. What does it mean to belong to God?
2. In what ways are you tempted to self-loathing?
How are you prone to self-exaltation?
3. How does Jesus protect us from thinking too lowly
and too highly of ourselves?

Heavenly Father ...

It's a joy to be your child. I'm made by your love and called for your purposes. Teach me today to think, love, and act like your child.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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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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