



Welcome to a study in the book of Ephesians. This book of the Bible was written by a follower of Jesus named Paul. Paul was responsible for writing number of books in the New Testament, or the second half of our Bible.

Most people believe this book was written during one of Paul's stints in prison around 60, AD.

Originally this was written as a letter sent by Paul to the Church in the region of Ephesus. It's written to the churches he helped start in the city of Ephesus and some of the surrounding area. The letter was designed to be shared among the churches for teaching as was the practice of the day.

Ephesus was a special city for Paul, he spent more than three years there during his ministry teaching, preaching and planting churches. He was deeply invested in the people of the area and in the success of the Gospel in this region because of how much he sacrificed to get things going there (Acts 19 - 20:38).

This is a great piece of Scripture to spend some time in, together. There are great lessons to connect with and a refreshing depth of connection to the Spirit of God. We hope you'll take the time to read and engage with this book of the Bible and the content provided in this study guide.

Join one of the discussion groups that's gathering during this season to talk about what you are learning with other believers! Enjoy!

Week One, Day One

Ephesians 1:1

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:”

If you have been around church very much at all, Paul is probably a name you are familiar with, but who is Paul? Paul was a complex dude and his story actually begins under another name. Paul was Saul.

The first time we hear anything about Saul, he's standing by approvingly while Stephen, a disciple of Jesus was being stoned to death, just outside of Jerusalem (Acts 7:57 - 8:1).

Saul, as a member of the Sanhedrin, the gathering of the religious authority in Jesus' day, took on a righteous duty to rid the world of the members of the Way (what followers of Jesus were called at the time) who were tainting their version of Judaism.

So Saul took lead of pursuing followers of the Way who were infecting the Jewish synagogues in the region. In Acts 9 you can read a story of Saul heading out on one of these missions when everything changes.

Acts 9:3-4

3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

Jesus himself confronted Saul on his journey, disrupted his plans and really his life, and started Saul out on a new path. Saul in time became the mouthpiece of the Gospel to the Gentiles, how the Jews referred to any people group that wasn't Jewish.

As the ambassador to the Greek speaking world, this Roman Jew, started going by the Greek version of his name, Paul.

In this first verse of his letter to the Church in Ephesus, Paul refers to himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.

This is such interesting wording because he's making every effort he can to make certain we understand, he didn't give himself the title of apostle, but that it's what God wanted. God named him and apostle of Jesus, Paul is just being obedient. For us this doesn't seem like a big deal or a meaningful conversation. However when Paul was planting churches and writing letters of encouragement and fundraising he would occasionally run into those who were wondering if he was qualified to be doing what he was doing.

Paul wanted to make it clear to everyone who might

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listen that he was chosen for this duty by God. He didn't self select in, but he's there in Christ's name at the will of God.

The title of apostle, in many circles, is reserved for those humans who actually walked with Jesus while He was on earth. Since Paul didn't come on the scene until after the death of Jesus, some didn't want to refer to Paul as an apostle. That title was to be reserved for a special few.

Paul interacted with Jesus on the road to Damascus, where his conversion happened, and he said himself in a number of places in other letters he wrote how he received the Gospel of Jesus from Jesus himself.

Questions:

1. Why do you think Jesus chose Saul to be His number one evangelist to the non-Jewish people of the world?
2. Why do you think Saul accepted the job? As a member of the Sanhedrin he had a lot to lose socially and financially by making this decision.
3. Have you experienced a radical transformation like Saul/Paul did? Have you ever told anyone your story? Would you be able to write it down to share it in the future?
4. Can you describe a time you felt chosen?

Week One, Day Two

Ephesians 1:1

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:”

Have you ever been called a saint?

How cool would that be? Now we have definitely adopted a less formal version of the word for our uses. Because if we are honest we know that none of us can actually become saints. Mostly because if you are reading this, you probably aren't Catholic and being Catholic is one of the official requirements.

But is that what's being referenced by Paul, in the first verse of his letter to the Church in Ephesus? No, being sainted wouldn't become a thing for another thousand years or so.

What then was Paul talking about in referencing the saints in Ephesus? Since you asked, the word Paul used here is hagios (hag-ee-os). It means different. Or in the context of following Jesus it means being different from the rest of the world. Set apart. Holy.

This definition seems way more accessible. Becoming a saint through the Catholic process of canonization means you have to perform two miracles and be dead

for five years. It's much easier to live being different than to live being dead for at least five years.

Being different in Ephesus wasn't easy. Just because it was a city a long time ago, doesn't mean it wasn't a massive, important metropolitan area. Ephesus was one of the five major cities in the Roman Empire.

Think like one of the five largest cities in the US (New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, Phoenix). Could you imagine trying to start a church, or trying to call on the people of one of these cities to change how they are living? Can you then imagine actually living differently as an example?

It wouldn't be easy and the people in Ephesus had been doing this for sometime. In that they had remained faithful to the calling God had placed on their lives. Faithful to the truth of the Gospel and their place in it.

Remaining faithful at this place in history was no easy task. Those in the city who were not happy about the change that had begun to take place around them. Ephesus was the guardian city of a pagan temple. People beginning to follow the Way and convincing others to do the same had impacted the finances of the people in the city who were dependent on the pagan temple for income. Furious they tried to incite the towns people against the Way saying they were threatening their way of life (Acts 19:23-41).

The saints in Ephesus had been through some things over the years. They had remained faithful despite it all.

Questions:

1. When you hear the word saint who is the first person you think of? Why?
2. Do you believe there is a need here to live differently than the rest of the city? Why or why not?
3. What are some practical things that might have to change for you to be able to actually live differently from the world around you?
4. How can you live differently from the world with isolating yourself from the world? Paul was able to be in the world but not part of it.

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Week One, Day Three

Ephesians 1:3-6

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.”

Who picks you makes a difference. Most of us remember a time when we were part of being picked for teams, playground style. Two captains, and a line of kids all waiting to get picked.

For some of us this was a miserable time, stress inducing and maybe embarrassing.

But did you ever have the one time that you got picked unexpectedly? Where someone you respected and appreciated picked you way sooner than you thought was probable? A teacher or coach who chose you when there were “better” people out there available?

Did you ask them why they picked you? And did they say something like, because you were the perfect pick

for my team? You were the piece of the team that was missing. I needed you and only you to fill that spot. Ever happened to you?

That's what God has done for us. God has chosen us to be part of His team. And what's key, why hopefully stands out over everything else is that He chose you before the creation of the world...

Before you ever did a single thing, God chose you. God isn't asking us to make it look like we are good enough. He chose you before you had a chance to try any of that. He chose you and He created you. In that order. Isn't that wild?

We are holy and blameless in His sight. That word, holy, is the same word, hagios that we talked about yesterday. We are set apart. We are different. Not because of who we are but because of who He is. Because of God these things are true. Because of Jesus we are blameless, not because we haven't or don't make mistakes, but because Jesus has taken all of our sins on himself, the Father sees us as blameless in Christ Jesus.

All of this was done ahead of time. Predestined is the word used, that means figured out ahead of time. The choosing of us wasn't a reaction to anything. It was decided before we were even on the scene. Being adopted as sons and daughters through Jesus means we get to be sons and daughters of God...Let that set

in. Like Jesus is the Son of God so are you a child of God.

Our adoption, the grace and mercy we receive is all through Jesus.

Questions:

1. How does it make you feel that you have been chosen by God?
2. Do you think it's fair that we can't qualify to be part of God's family, but we can only be chosen by Him?
3. Do you feel set apart and different from the rest of the world? Why or why not?

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Week One, Day Four

Ephesians 1:7-8

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us.”

Why does it have to be blood? Blood is not for everyone. Some people can’t stand the sight of blood, so why does blood have to be involved in this whole redemption story? It actually goes all the way back to the book of Leviticus. In this book God gives the Law to the people of God. And He explains why it has to be blood.

“For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life.” Leviticus 17:11

We need Jesus to atone for our sins, to reestablish our relationship with God, and the only way that can happen is for His blood to be spilled.

God loves us so much He’s willing to send His Son Jesus on our behalf. The riches of grace are giving us what we don’t deserve, and that He lavishes on us. Lavish means elaborate and luxurious. Grace is already receiving what we don’t deserve and God

takes it to another level by lavishing that Grace upon us. Isn’t He good?

One of the struggles we can have is struggling to be good enough to please God and get what we feel we deserve. We can tend to forget that there is nothing we can do to earn our redemption. There is no good enough on our own. We always need help.

God voluntarily offers us the help we need, even when sometimes we don’t yet know we need it.

Questions:

1. How has the forgiveness you’ve received from God changed your life?
2. Have you felt like God has lavished upon you?
3. How does that feel, knowing you don’t deserve it?

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Week One, Day Five

Ephesians 1:8b-10

“With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.”

Do you remember as a child feeling like a special surprise or a big trip was just sprung on you? You didn't know anything about it, why would your parents do that?

Is it possible you wouldn't be able to comprehend at a young age and maturity the totality of the event or trip and they didn't want to deal with all the questions?

This is exactly what God has done for us in regards to His plan for humanity. He only shows us what we can handle when we can handle it. It's a mystery until God reveals the key to us.

What's truly interesting in this passage is that not only is Paul talking about how God has revealed part of the mystery so far, but also he's talking about how there are still future times that we don't know yet about. That He hasn't seen fit to reveal to us yet.

Basically, what we know is already the greatest story ever told. How could God ever top that? With what is still to come.

A remarkable part of this passage is the part that talks about “his good pleasure”.

God isn't saving us, offering grace and mercy begrudgingly. It's His good pleasure. He's glad about it.

The hard part of all of this to believe is that God knows everything and it's still His good pleasure to reveal the grace and mercy of Jesus. How is that possible? God knows our thoughts? The deepest desires of our hearts and yet He's still in it for us.

Another piece of this that's remarkable to consider is the idea that the goal at the end of time is unity in all things. God's hope is to bring all things together. It's not an us versus them sort of thing. God is the Creator of all of us, He wants to bring us all together.

Unity is His plan and the plan to achieve that unity is Jesus. We've in our past used Jesus to separate us from others, to divide, rather than to unify. Unity isn't really our default mode of being. But it's God's. He's relational. He's unifying. And it's what He has for us as well.

Questions:

1. Can you remember when you first had an

understanding of the mystery of the Gospel? What did it mean to you then? How has the meaning of the Gospel changed for you over time?

2. The Gospel is the fulfillment of the Law, what do you think this future fulfillment is all about?

3. What area of your life do you need more unity? Home? Family? Work? Friends?

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Week One, Day Six

Ephesians 1:11-12 MSG

“It’s in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone.”

Purpose: the reason for which something is done or created or for which something exists.

Something that is true regardless of what you believe about God or Jesus is that you have been created on purpose, for a purpose.

Part of our journey in life is to discover what that purpose is. Who has God made you to be?

Purpose is what can motivate us. Studies show that our work satisfaction these days is primarily tied to understanding our purpose. Are we living for more than ourselves?

Are you aware that there are other people on the planet? People that God has designed us to interact with. In fact, God aligns our purposes with others, so that we are in it with them. Even our purpose can be communal. What God has given us to do, is for the

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benefit of more than just ourselves. In fact, the entirety of our lives is not for ourselves.

God tells us over and over again it's not about us. We want it to be about us. We want all of life to be oriented so we have the advantage over others. But the reality of God's plan is that we are to bring others up with us. If we are on the rise, it is for the purpose of bringing others with us.

This glorious living Paul speaks of includes the community around us. We can't avoid being a part of the community God has placed us in. Our purpose is entwined with our community, just like God has planned.

Questions:

1. Are you clear on what your purpose is? Will you talk about it?
2. How would you define the community that God has placed you in? (Think more specifically than just the town you live in.)
3. If you leaned wholly into the purpose God has given you, what impact would that have in your community?
4. What could your community accomplish if each person in it lived into their purpose?

Week One, Day Seven

Ephesians 1:13-4 MSG

“It’s in Christ that you, once you heard the truth and believed it (this Message of your salvation), found yourselves home free—signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit. This down payment from God is the first installment on what’s coming, a reminder that we’ll get everything God has planned for us, a praising and glorious life.”

How big of an imagination do you have? What’s the wildest future you can imagine? What does it involve? Who’s there with you?

It’s really hard to imagine everything that God has planned for us. We are so limited in our thinking that we can’t even get near what God has in store for us, but He does give us a quick phrase to get us in the neighborhood.

What God has planned for us is a praising and glorious life.

What does that mean? This is a clue to our purpose in life. It all boils down to the best life being one that is full of praise. And that’s not just a Sunday morning music thing. A life of praising is one where everything we do, work, cooking, reading, teaching can all be

done from the perspective of praising God in and through it.

What does a glorious life mean?

Glorious: having, worthy of, or bringing fame or admiration. Our life is one that through our praising we bring fame and admiration not to ourselves, but to God.

Does it change how you view what a successful life should look and feel like to you?

Is the goal of our lives to win, be the best at our jobs, be rich? Maybe. Maybe that is how God will have us live a praising and glorious life. But maybe not. Maybe there is another way.

Questions:

1. Do you believe that God has a plan for your entire life?
2. What do you think God’s plan for you life is, if the target is a praising and glorious life?
3. How would you explain what you feel like God’s plan for you is, to someone you are walking with?
4. Is there one thing you either hope is included or excluded from the plan that God has for your life?

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Week Two, Day One

Ephesians 1:15-17

“For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.”

Paul is giving us a great example to follow in this passage. Paul is praying for the Church in Ephesus. Not for a building or a name or a logo, but the church is the people and it’s them he’s praying for.

Paul has heard of their faith and their love for God’s people. Seems like they are nailing the big two. Love God, love people.

His response to that is to give thanks to God. Something for you to ponder is do you give thanks to God when you see a friend or an acquaintance having things go really well? What do you feel when you see that? Are you happy for them or do you wonder why it’s not you having the success?

Paul is able to give thanks because he has a really clear perspective that following Jesus is a team sport. Paul knows you can’t infinitely expand a movement of

God all by yourself. You need a team of faithful believers along with you. And to get to that place we need to encourage those who are on the journey with us.

What else can we ask from our leaders and mentors but to have them pray for us? In turn, how else can we bless those we are leading than to remember them in our prayers, always. Sometimes we short change the power of prayer. The power of just lifting those we know and love up to God.

Something crucial to take away from this passage is what the prayers entail. Paul is not asking for safety, or good things to happen to us as we might think of it. He's asking for us to have the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. Notice, the Spirit is capitalized, meaning he's talking about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit who gives us wisdom and revelation from God.

The wisdom and revelation are not so that we can have an advantage in life, but it's so we can know God better. What Paul wants for you and me more than anything else is to know God better. What else could be better than that?

Questions:

1. When you think of other people and are compelled to pray for them, how do you tend to pray?

2. Does reading this passage give you any different ideas for how to pray for your friends and loved ones?
3. Do you think praying for other people brings you closer to God?

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Week Two, Day Two

Ephesians 1:18-23

“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”

How much power is too much?

Power is this interesting thing that so many of us pursue and maybe even covet. We want power because of the advantages we believe it gives us. With power we can have control and maybe control is what we actually want. We want to make sure things go the way we want them to. Because we have the best plan for our life, so give us the power we need to gain the control we desire.

Power for us humans is only an illusion. We believe we have power when in reality it's just not the case. We have only what God has given us and the illusions of power we hold onto, aren't even from God, but a trick of the enemy.

The power referenced in this passage is that of God. An unbelievable power that is truly hard for us to fathom. One of the most unbelievable parts of the Gospel is that Jesus was raised from the dead. Paul here is referencing the power of God and his use of it for the resurrection of Jesus. That power, is the power that is available to us from God, through Jesus.

That power is not for us to use for personal gain. It's for use in the Kingdom of God, for the Kingdom of God. But when we connect with God and His power we can be used for great things.

But it's fair to think the power of God is uncontrollable, which makes us very nervous. We want power and control. When we lean into the power of God we get access to the power, but no control. Which might be the reason we are tentative to seek to align with God and gain access to His power.

It's clear from this passage that God has given all control over to Jesus. Which should give us hope. The goal of this life is to become and persevere as a follower of Jesus. That's it. If that's our life, the power of God comes with it and we willingly surrender all

control to Jesus. It's not taken from us, we've actually never had any control, but we definitely don't work to gain control once we've given our lives to Jesus.

Questions:

1. How comfortable are you with Jesus being in total control of your life?
2. Do you believe what you think is best for you and yours aligns with what Jesus has for you?
3. How might God use His power through you and your life?

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Week Two, Day Three

Ephesians 2:1-3 MSG

"It wasn't so long ago that you were mired in that old stagnant life of sin. You let the world, which doesn't know the first thing about living, tell you how to live. You filled your lungs with polluted unbelief, and then exhaled disobedience. We all did it, all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it, all of us in the same boat. It's a wonder God didn't lose his temper and do away with the whole lot of us."

Where do you get your marching orders for how to live? We have options. Everywhere we look, something or someone is telling us what the good life is supposed to look like. Or even better we are told about what we are missing out on.

The needs we have, according to the world are many. How can we live a satisfied life if we don't have this, or we have an old version of that? A life with this thing is so much better than a life without it.

The problem is the life the world wants for us isn't a life at all. It's a lie.

We are told that we should be doing whatever we feel like doing. Do what makes you feel good. But how is that going for us? In case you haven't figured it out yet, the desires of our heart are often deceiving.

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We desire things that aren't necessarily of God. We can be selfish and all about us. That's not what we are supposed to be focused on.

But God is patient. He continues to provide a way back for us. His door is always open. His grace and mercy are beyond our comprehension.

Our part is to work to change our desires and get them to align with God's. That's the path to bringing heaven to earth. Molding our hearts to God's. Becoming more like Him today than you were yesterday. Follow Him. Get rid of our deceitful heart and replace it with God's. We can never go wrong if this is our posture.

Questions:

1. Describe what a day in your life is supposed to look like?
2. How does that differ from what your life is like now?
3. Can you name some of the lies the world tells you about what your life is supposed to look like?
4. What from your old life are you most thankful for God's grace and mercy?

Week Two, Day Four

Ephesians 2:4-5

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”

What’s your favorite love song? Is it from today this year or when you think of a love song does an old song come to mind? Do you go to Whitney Houston, I Will Always Love You? Or are you more a UB40, I can’t help falling in love with you? When you say that can you hear the song in your head?

Maybe some John Legend, All of Me pops into your mind. Regardless of your flavor of song, can we at least agree that the first movie we think of is Forrest Gump and we hear Forrest say, “I know what love is.”?

We think we get love, human love. We understand the feeling we get or the feeling we chase when we believe we are in love. Do we get how it feels to be loved? And will we let it happen?

For God so loved the world...it’s the most famous line in all of the Bible. People all over the world have heard John 3:16. But do we truly get what this means?

God loves us so much, us just as we are right now, as He finds us right now. He loves us and He gives us mercy.

Mercy is not receiving what we deserve. And God chose to make us alive in Christ even though we were dead in our sins. Sin kills us. Christ brings us back to life. But it’s not because of anything we have done or will do. It’s because of God’s great love for us.

We can’t explain or imagine the kind of love God has for us. We get to experience some shadows of that love why we are on earth in marriage and in having kids, but it’s just a shadow of the real love God has for us.

His love spares us. His love saves us.

Questions:

1. How have you experienced God’s great love?
2. What’s one way you might be able to share God’s love with someone else?
3. What do you feel more, God’s mercy or His grace?
4. What are you most thankful for being saved from?

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Week Two, Day Five

Ephesians 2:4-7

“4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”

It's okay not to be okay, but it's not okay to stay that way.

Jesus is all about transformation. That sounds great in theory, we are all for transformation. But when it comes time for us to change we become a little less pro transformation.

Jesus tells us to come as we are. To show up with all of our messes and mistakes and just give it all to Jesus. When we surrender though, we give Jesus permission to give us a new life. The fancy word for that is regeneration.

That means the old life has to die so that the new life can take hold. If we try to hold onto our old life while

at the same time claiming we want a new life we learn quickly that's not possible. Either we aren't changing at all or it all has to die. There literally is no middle ground.

God does all the work all we have to do is receive it. And what we receive when we say yes and surrender, is we are seated in the heavenly realms next to Jesus. When we surrender, we are literally in the same family as Jesus.

Notice what the incomparable riches are? It's in grace. The overwhelming awesome of God is in His grace. It doesn't matter how far you've felt from Him or how far from God you've lived, His grace will cover it all.

Questions:

1. Think about being seated next to Christ, what does that look like in your head?

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Week Two, Day Six

Ephesians 2:8-9

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Grace is kind of a buzz word. It's one of those words we know what it is, what it means...mostly.

Grace: receiving what we do not deserve and have not earned.

Grace is absolutely something that seems too good to be true. And have we been taught since we were little. If something seems too good to be true, it probably is. Be wary. Don't trust it.

We are brought up defensive, to be on guard. The last thing we are interested in is surrender. Surrender means giving up control and not being in control doesn't feel safe.

Then we have to ask ourselves, what's the goal? Is the goal stay in control but never find freedom? The only way to the grace that Paul is talking about here is through surrender. We have to give up ourselves. Our lives. Our plans. And put all of our faith in Jesus and adopt the story He has for us.

What about this faith? How would you explain faith?

Where would you start? There is a Bible definition for faith, “Being sure of what you hope for and certain of what you do not see.” Hebrews 11:1 TNIV

It means you just believe. That’s the entry exam for the Kingdom of God. Faith. What does it take for you to believe? What do you have to see or experience? With faith you receive grace. Grace enough for everything you have ever done. Everything you will ever do.

One thing you may wrestle with in this conversation is that our role is clearly limited. Saved by grace through faith means it’s not about us. It’s all God. Again, we like control. We like to be able to choose. This is totally out of our hands.

You would think we would be relieved to know God is fully in control. But is that true? Is that how we actually feel? Don’t we want the opportunity to boast about all we have done? Paul makes it clear that’s not the story.

Grace is our gift from God. No one can earn it. No one deserves it. And that’s a good thing.

Questions:

1. What is something or someone it’s easy for you to have faith in?
2. Where in your life is it easy for you to offer grace to others?

3. What do have control over that you wish you didn’t?
4. What’s the hardest part of surrendering control to God?

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Week Two, Day Seven

Ephesians 2:10

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

This verse may sound a little confusing if you read yesterday. We talked about grace comes through faith and not through works. Now today, we read that we are created in Christ to do good works. What's the deal?

The first convo is about receiving grace, that isn't done by works. The second is talking about in the grace that we have received, God isn't done with us. He has given us work to do right now, right where we are.

His works are what we have been created for, they are the reason we are still here on earth. If He didn't have work for us, He would have taken us up as soon as we believed. But that isn't the case. We are still here, so let's get to work.

We can be confident that God has placed us where we are supposed to be, because it's been His plan literally forever. He's prepared all of our work in advance. He knows the plans He has for us. He's not shooting from the hip. All our work is playing a role in

His grand plan. We can't shy away from it because everything works together. Everyone works together and we get to play our part in all of it.

Questions:

1. Do you actually believe you are God's handiwork?
2. When you think of the word masterpiece, what do you think of?
3. Name all the good works you can think of.

NOTES:

Week Three, Day One

Ephesians 2:11-12

“Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands)— 12 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.”

Maybe you didn't want to have a conversation about circumcision when you woke up this morning. But here it is so do with it what you like.

Circumcision has a significant meaning to the Jewish people. Established via the Law as a plan for all the males of the Israelites with the intent of it being the sign of joining in the covenant of God. It's not about pain or suffering or awkward, but all about being a sign of being part of the covenant people with God.

Any of the group of people who aren't the covenant people are known in the Bible as Gentiles. Here this group is referenced as Gentiles by birth. Which is quite curious. The goal isn't for the Gentiles to become Israelites from today's viewpoint but back in Jesus' time they weren't sure there was another way. Jesus was Jewish. The reality is the goal is for them to become part of the people of God.

And the key to that being possible is Jesus. Before it was technically possible but the process for it to happen was clunky at best and it came with a promise of pain.

The view before Jesus was one where it was nearly impossible for a Gentile to populate the Kingdom of God. Jesus changed all of that and gave all of us access to the Kingdom of God.

Questions:

1. What was your life like when you separate from Christ? How would you describe it?
2. How would/is life different not being separate from Jesus?
3. Has there been a time in your life you were without hope? What changed?

NOTES:

Week Three, Day Two

Ephesians 2:13

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

We talked yesterday about how Jesus was the key to our access to the Kingdom of God. The Jews believed they were the people of God because of the covenant God made with His people through circumcision.

Our access to God had to come a different way. This verse tells us we have been brought near by the blood of Christ. What does that mean?

Simply, we have been separated from God by sin. God is a God of justice so when sin occurs there must be atonement, sacrifice made to make up for the sin that happened. God gave the Law (think the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy) to describe what sacrifices are needed to compensate for the sin.

Jesus came to fulfill the Law. What would that take? "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life." Lev. 17:11

Jesus became the ultimate sacrifice, once, for all. He became the sacrifice we needed to be redeemed in

our relationship with God. Once we were far away and through Christ, we have been brought near. If we were on our own, it wouldn't be the same story. But thanks be to God, that's not the case.

There wasn't another way for us to be brought into the Kingdom of God except for Jesus to shed His blood. And He did it.

Questions:

1. Do you feel near to God?
2. When have you felt closer? Farther?

NOTES:

Week Three, Day Three

Ephesians 2:14-16

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

How often has peace been the goal of your day? Peace maybe isn't something we focus on often, but it seems pretty important. What is your life like when you lack peace? How do you sleep? How do you function during the day if peace is far from you?

Jesus is known as the Prince of Peace. Just being present with Him avails us to peace. Now what truly is peace?

Peace means no war, within ourselves or with others. Peace means no anxiety. Peace means more hope. Peace means capacity for hope. Peace is worth pursuing.

What's wild is the plan of the Romans was to disrupt the peace by using the most violent tool in their toolbox. The cross was designed to be terrifying, but

God in Christ turned the tool of terror into a peace making machine.

Peace came to the world through the cross of Jesus.

Questions:

1. Where do you most need peace in your life?
2. Where have you looked for peace outside of Jesus? How has that gone for you (be honest)?
3. What's something in your life intended for evil that God could use to bring peace around you?

NOTES:

Week Three, Day Four

Ephesians 2:17-18

He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Jesus came to restore our relationship with the Father. This passage points to the trinity. The trinity being God in three persons, Father, Son and Spirit. Verse 18 talks about through Jesus we receive access to the Father through the Spirit.

This means we get to pray. Prayer is a privilege not a chore. We have a direct line to God.

How do you use your direct line? Do you use it constantly or sparingly? What are you talking with God about? Nothing is off limits. God has heard it all. And He wants to have a relationship with you.

Regardless of where you are coming to God from, He still wants to hear from you. It's not like He can't handle it.

What's beautiful about this passage is that God is where groups who are diametrically opposed meet. There isn't one story or one trajectory that gets you to God.

Without Jesus, none of us here would have access to God. Jesus brought us all to equal footing, not just with each other but with Him. We are sons and daughters, co-heirs in the Kingdom!

Questions:

1. How would you describe your prayer life?
2. If you believe you have a direct line with God, do you believe He talks to you?
3. What have you heard from Him?

NOTES:

Week Three, Day Five

Ephesians 2:19-20

“That’s plain enough, isn’t it? You’re no longer wandering exiles. This kingdom of faith is now your home country. You’re no longer strangers or outsiders. You belong here, with as much right to the name Christian as anyone. God is building a home. He’s using us all—irrespective of how we got here—in what he is building. He used the apostles and prophets for the foundation.”

You belong here.

How good does that feel? It doesn’t matter how you got here, but you are where you are supposed to be.

There is a place for you here. And not just to hang out. Jesus has a job for you to do as part of the Kingdom of God.

The gifts God has given to you are yours to use for Kingdom purposes. Your gifts are needed as part of a greater team. The team works together for purposes greater than the individual.

You are not here on accident. It may be time to live like that is true. Not as a spectator. Jesus didn’t call you to himself and this church to just hang out and

be seen here. He called you to be a part of what He is doing in us and through us.

Questions:

1. What gifts has God given to you, to use here?
2. Do you know how/where to use the gifts you have?

NOTES:

Week Three, Day Six

Ephesians 2:21

“In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.”

The Church is the body of Christ. Paul is using a building to describe how the body works together with Jesus so the whole can rise together.

It's a beautiful picture of us all being needed in the body of Christ to play the role that's been assigned to each of us. We don't need to worry about anyone else's assignment, just our own.

We can encourage each other. Support one another. Help one another out. To create the idea of a temple or a place to meet with God.

For the Israelite people, the place to meet with God was the temple and that was the only place. He lived there. In Jesus we don't need a physical temple. Jesus doesn't live in the temple. That season was ended when the veil tore as Jesus died on the cross.

God lives within each of us in the Holy Spirit. What a gift that is. God can't get any closer to us than residing within us. The Spirit is there to guide us constantly.

Questions:

1. What role do you see yourself playing in the Kingdom of God?

NOTES:

Week Three, Day Seven

Ephesians 2:22

“And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”

A dwelling is a place you live. To dwell can also mean to spend time.

Either way, this is a good thing. It's a good thing to consider that God wants us to be a dwelling place for His Spirit. That's the plan.

Not only that God wants to spend time with us. He wants to be present with us. The question we have to ask ourselves is, do we want to spend time with God?

The obvious answer is of course, but do our actions line up with our words? Are we doing the things that help us to focus on the presence of God? Are we listening for God on a daily basis?

If we wholeheartedly believed the Spirit of God lives in us, how would we live differently? What would change if anything? Are we scheduling time to spend paying attention to God?

Like any relationship, we will get from it what we are willing to put into it. What you put into can look a lot of different ways. There's no one way to connect with God, He uniquely relates with each of us.

Questions:

1. What are some ways you can try connecting with God?
2. What's a good way to remind yourself, that God dwells within you?

NOTES:

Week Four, Day One

Ephesians 3:1-6

“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—

2 Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you, 3 that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. 4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets. 6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”

Paul is working in this passage to make clear that even though he didn’t walk with Jesus during His ministry, he (Paul) is in fact qualified to be leading the church planting movement throughout the known world.

His wording is so interesting, ‘God’s grace that was given to me for you’. It would appear from this line that the grace we receive isn’t for us to hoard all to ourselves, but that we are to pass it on after we’ve received it. The grace Paul received, which remember

was vast, wasn’t just for him, but it was enough for him to pass on to all the Gentiles. Enough for every non-Jewish person in the world. Unbelievable!

Paul talks about the mystery made known to him through revelation. Revelation means receiving information directly from God and not through a human. Jesus told Paul, all the plans He had for him. That’s remarkable and the Bible doesn’t say when this happened. But Paul did have a few years of a break between his Damascus road experience and the start of his public ministry, so maybe that’s when it happened.

Paul makes it clear that God controlled the information he received and the timing of it. The invitation of the Gentiles into the Kingdom of God was a new thing, that former generations didn’t know anything about. That plan was made known to humans starting with Paul.

As we look back at this story it makes sense that we (Gentiles) are included. It’s a neat story and because we are brought over to the winning side, it’s a happy ending which we like.

For the Israelites confronted with this massive change it had to be really hard to accept. They had been taught for generations not to inter mingle or inter marry with any non-Jewish people. There were laws against those things. This wasn’t just a church problem, this was a society disruption on the largest

of magnitudes. Not just didn't the Israelites go to church with the Gentiles, they weren't doing any life with them if it could be avoided.

So when Paul showed up and started talking about the Kingdom of God being open to Gentiles, folks who had been "okay" with Jesus because He was Jewish and just talking about a different brand of what they already knew, all of a sudden weren't okay. There was pushback and Paul was getting thrown under the bus.

Which is why Paul was defending himself here. Israelites couldn't imagine themselves being considered equal heirs to the Kingdom of God alongside the people they had been taught to despise and avoid.

That kind of grace was unsettling. It would kind of be like having to cheer voraciously for your favorite teams biggest rival in order for your favorite team to win. Vikings fans, cheer loud for those Packers. Hawkeye fans, learn all the words to the Ohio State fight song. Cyclone fans, figure out how Rock Chalk, Jayhawk goes.

None of us would want to do this. It would make us a little sick to even consider it. What Paul was doing was worse than that. But thank God he was obedient!

Questions:

1. Can you imagine hearing from God the way Paul did?
2. Thus far in your life, how have you been at passing on the grace you have received to others?
3. Do you know who the grace you have received is for?

NOTES:

Week Four, Day Two

Ephesians 3:7-9

"I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. **8** Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, **9** and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things."

What are you qualified to do? In your work or family life, what are you qualified to do? Do you have letters after your name? Licenses? How much of what you do in life do you feel wholly qualified to do?

If you have found yourself in the situation of saying no to an opportunity to serve God in the past because you didn't feel qualified to do it, Paul just peed in your Cheerios.

Paul says he's the least of all the Lord's people but he's going to do the tasks that God has assigned to him to do. Remember a few days back when we talked about the works that God has prepared in advance for us to do? That's what Paul is doing. Whether he feels qualified or not doesn't matter. What matters is his willingness to serve in the Kingdom of God wherever God has him. To that he has said yes.

Paul said yes regardless of his current circumstances and regardless of where his yes would take him. He just trusted God and said yes. He said it like this:

I was the least qualified of any of the available Christians. God saw to it that I was equipped, but you can be sure that it had nothing to do with my natural abilities. Ephesians 3:7-8 MSG

He trusted God enough to say yes, knowing full well God would have to do the equipping and he'd be relying on God for everything because what was asked was outside his natural abilities.

This significantly opens up the boundaries of what we can say yes to in the Kingdom of God. Not qualified? Perfect! God will equip you. Millions of people a better fit? Doesn't matter, you said yes and God is with you.

Now to the what Paul gets to do. Preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ.

That could be one of the most beautiful phrases in the entire Bible. The boundless riches of Christ. The word used here in the greek translated boundless is anexichniastos - not able to trace the steps of, impossible to track, incomprehensible, unfathomable.

The riches of God's grace through Christ is enough for anything and everything anyone has ever done or will do. It's an inexhaustible grace. That's the riches Paul had the opportunity to preach and we have the same opportunity to share this truth today in our contexts.

Questions:

1. What do you feel unqualified to do?
2. What would need to happen for you to feel qualified for what you answered above?
3. Do you believe that's possible? Why? Why not?

NOTES:

Week Four, Day Three

Ephesians 3:10-11

“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, **11** according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Okay, now the water is getting pretty deep. We'll go slow here. The first key to think about is the first two words of this passage. His intent...God has an intent that He is making happen. What's remarkable is that His intent includes the church.

This means simply the church has work to do. God has a plan for His Church and it's up to us to serve Him in that way. This might be a key to how we think about the serving in the church.

God has work He wants to get done through the church. God's people are gifted and equipped by Him to do the work. The final step is to follow through with that and do it. The church doesn't want something from you, the church wants you to get to be a part of what God is doing through it.

The church in its existence and mission is making known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms that they have lost. Jesus has won and their

time ruling is coming to an end. We don't have to communicate directly with those beings for them to get the message. The way they get the message is when we do the work of the church. Making Christ Known. Sharing the boundless riches of grace.

The reference to the rulers and authorities of the heavenly realms Paul is talking about the evil at work in the world from the spiritual realm.

The way the church battles against this unseen enemy is to do the work of the church, announcing the triumph of Christ through the mission of God, given to us by Him.

What you are apart of in the local church is no little thing. You don't just get to tag along. You have been created, gifted and equipped to be a part of announcing to the bad spirits, that Jesus is King, He has won and there is nothing they can do about it.

You are a part of the greatest army of all time. You are on the winning side. The war is won, but some battles continue. And God has entrusted His Church with the responsibility for those. It's up to us. It's up to you.

This is no small thing. It's not just church. It's way bigger and better than that.

Questions:

1. Did you know the Church had been given such a huge responsibility?

2. Now that you know, how does that make you feel about your role in the church?
3. What mission, vision or value of the church do you best align with? Why?

NOTES:

Week Four, Day Four

Ephesians 3:12-13

“In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. **13** I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.”

Did you know that in the 1800's you could go to the White House and see the President? You could speak to a secretary and get in a line to have a face to face meeting with the president. The presidency was considered a public office and the president should meet with the public. That was the thought.

It was a regular part of the president's schedule to meet with people who were there. Often people would travel from the farther reaches of the country, meet with the president one day, then stay in Washington until the president had reached a decision on what they visited about.

Nowadays no one would imagine just walking up to the front gate at the White House and asking to meet with the president. Things have changed, times have changed. Over about the past 100 years access to the president has changed into what it is today. The biggest changes coming after Woodrow Wilson's stroke and during the second world war.

Wilson stopped meeting with the public after his stroke and the gates to the White House were closed constantly for the first time during WW II for fear of attack.

So it is understandable that we can't imagine having access to God. The president is a human and we can't get anywhere near the office, how could we have access to God?

Jesus.

We may approach God with freedom and confidence because of Jesus. What an amazing gift Jesus has given us.

Questions:

1. Have you approached God with freedom and confidence? Why? Why not?

NOTES:

Week Four, Day Five

Ephesians 3:14-17a

“For this reason I kneel before the Father, **15** from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. **16** I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, **17** so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.”

Is there anything in your world that you truly take for granted? Here's an example. In a number of countries, they have electrical power, but not all day. In fact, in a lot of places they only have power for a few hours a day. The power needs have outpaced the infrastructure.

How about running water? A bed to yourself? Political freedom?

Have you ever thought about taking for granted the Spirit of God dwelling within you? Of course not, but I think it's because we don't often think of that being true.

Could you imagine having a conversation with someone like Moses or Ezekiel from the Old Testament stories in the Bible and telling them that the Spirit of God lives inside you?

You have constant access to God. You don't have to go to the Temple or the Tent of Meeting to encounter God, He literally lives within you.

Don't you think they would be in awe? Do you think they would consider you powerful?

It's possible that maybe we take for granted that followers of Jesus have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them. We don't have the awe regarding that truth that Old Testament folks would have if we could share that with them.

We don't ever need to be far from God. There were stretches in the history of Israel where it seemed like God had abandoned the Israelites to the desires of their hearts, as evil as they were. We don't ever have to face that. Jesus lives within us. We might ignore Him. We might not listen to Him, but we are never far from Him.

Questions:

1. When have you felt closest to God?
2. When have you felt furthest away from Him?

NOTES:

Week Four, Day Six

Ephesians 3:17b - 19

“And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, **18** may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, **19** and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

Have you ever heard of the Guinness Book of World Records? There are some really weird things in there, but there are some really cool things you can learn in there as well.

The largest mountain in the world...the Mauna Kea volcano. Yeah, Mt. Everest is the largest that is all about sea level, but Mauna Kea is much larger in total. It’s more than 10,000 meters in total compared to Mt. Everest’s 8800 meters.

The deepest part of the ocean? It’s known as the Challenger Deep and it’s about 35,876 feet deep. That’s significantly further down, than you can go up on earth.

Regardless of how enamored with the extremes of things in our known world, we still may struggle to truly understand the extremeness of the love of Christ. Can we truly grasp how wide and long and

high and deep the love of Christ is? Can you measure the amount of grace you’ve received in your life? Do you understand how much you’ve been forgiven?

Probably not.

Is it possible to understand how much Jesus loved us to willingly leave His place in heaven to come here to be born as a child, live a human life and die a horrible death all so that we could have access to the Father?

Probably not. But that doesn’t mean it’s not true.

Questions:

1. Describe as best you can how big Jesus’ love for you is.
2. How will you use this information?

NOTES:

Week Four, Day Seven

Ephesians 3:20-21

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, **21** to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”

Immeasurable is a word that you probably don't use often. Because most things are measurable. It's knowable how far it is from where you are to New Orleans. You can know how fast a Pontiac Firebird went from 0 - 60 mph. Calories, watts, grams, miles, dollars; all sorts of things are measurable.

The closest thing we can get to something that is immeasurable is space. How big is the universe? No one really knows. You can find a number that describes the size of the observable universe. But that's just what we have the capacity for and we know the universe is still expanding.

Jesus, can do more than all we can ask or imagine through His power.

His power is greater than anything we've ever encountered. He can do the things that are impossible to us. The power He does it with resides in us. We have the ability to tap into that power when

we submit to His will. When we submit to what He wants to do in and through us, we have access to an unreal power. Do you want it?

Questions:

1. Are you willing to submit to Jesus to access the power inside of you?
2. What's the wildest thing you can imagine right now?
3. How much of Jesus doing more than we can ask or imagine is about our inability to grasp what's truly important in life?

NOTES:

Week Five, Day One

Ephesians 4:1

“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”

Paul is calling himself a prisoner for the Lord, not you, but he does deliver a really good charge to us.

Live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Questions:

1. Are you clear about your calling?
2. What are you called to? What were you made for? What makes you tick?
3. If you were living a life fully aligned with your calling, what would that life look like? How different is that from your life now?

NOTES:

Week Five, Day Two

Ephesians 4:2-3

“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

There is no way around it, this entire passage is difficult. First off, these aren't asks, they are commands. It's not a suggestion, it would be nice if this happened, it's a command. Be humble. Be patient. Be gentle. Be a peace maker.

These things are all really difficult to do. Luckily, Jesus doesn't expect us to do these things on our own. We can only do these things when we are living in Him. When we align with the Spirit living within us and use His power to function.

When we try to go it alone, we mess it up.

When we lean on Jesus, He shows us the way He took. He chose to humble himself. He was gentle with the lost and broken. He was super patient with his disciples when they continually couldn't understand their roles and who He truly was.

Jesus is all about peace and unity. He's a peace maker, meaning that sometimes He ruffles some feathers

but it's for the purpose of peace. Jesus wasn't an appeaser, just doing what everyone wants, He holds people accountable and He's patient while we get it figured out.

Questions:

1. What's one part of your life, you need to choose to approach more humbly?
2. Who do you need to treat more gently?
3. With whom is God asking you to practice patience?
4. Is there a place in your life where God is calling you to unity and peace making?

NOTES:

Week Five, Day Three

Ephesians 4:4-6

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

Jesus is the one hope we were called to. The great part about our faith is Jesus is that it was awakened, made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit. God moved first and His work, made it possible for us to believe.

To be clear we have no hope outside of Jesus. He's it. He's the plan to redeem humanity. He's not a part of it, it's all Him. It's the only faith that matters. He calls us to be baptized, die to our old lives and be raised to new life, like He was, to the glory of the one Father.

The last part of this passage is remarkable. It says, "who is over all and through all and in all."

God is in all of us. He is the creator of all things. A little bit of God is in all of creation.

Sometime when you get a chance there's a great video that Louie Giglio did years ago that talked about God being in all things. It's a recording of one of his big worship events where he talked about laminin.

Week Five, Day Four

Ephesians 4:7-10

“But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸ This is why it says:

“When he ascended on high,
he took many captives
and gave gifts to his people.”

⁹ (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? ¹⁰ He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)

Our faith was never meant to be considered solely individually. We have tended to turn it into an individual or private thing, but the reality of the design was communal. That’s why no one person receives all the gifts. But Jesus spreads the gifts out through the community of believers.

Verse 7 in the Message says, “Out of the generosity of Christ, each of us is given his own gifts.” Because of the generosity of Jesus, the idea is to use those gifts for the good of the whole.

To invest those gifts in the community for the betterment of the entire group rather than just for ourselves.

Laminin is a protein found in the human body that participates in the holding together of our cells. That’s a basic explanation, but it gets the point across.

Laminin being a protein or holding our cells together isn’t the coolest part. It’s what laminin looks like under a microscope or as a scientific drawing that makes those truths remarkable. You see laminin is in the shape of a cross.

The primary protein that holds all of our cells together is in the shape of a cross. He is over all and through all and in all.

Questions:

1. What does one hope mean to you?
2. Do you remember your baptism? What do you remember about it?
3. Where do you see a little bit of God in Creation?

NOTES:

They are very much our gifts. Each our own. But they are used most effectively as part of a group. Where each of us can play off the other. The church plays an important role in understanding how we can work together. It's a construct for an opportunity to use our gifts for His glory.

God's hope is our response to His generosity would be participation. Use our gifts together with our brothers and sisters.

Questions:

1. What gifts has God generously given you?
2. How could you use those gifts in our community?

NOTES:

Week Five, Day Five

Ephesians 4:11-13

"So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

What could the "whole measure of the fullness of Christ" possibly mean?

There is so much to Jesus. He is fully God. He's 100% God. All the power of God is available to Him. He's all knowing. He's all powerful. He's everywhere all at once. All that is true about God is true about Him.

And.

This is a big and. And, He is fully human. He was born to a woman. He was a baby. Vulnerable. Struggling in a small poor village with His family. He had brothers and sisters. He learned a trade. He got lost by His parents for a few days. He cried. He suffered. He laughed. He was sad. All the things.

The fullness of Christ is quite the complex idea. How can both of these things be true?

Fair question. But this what makes Jesus so amazing. Jesus took on our sin, past, present and future. He suffered, as a human, through the punishment that was meted out for the sins we committed.

Jesus chose to suffer in our place. Jesus chose to take it upon himself even though it wasn't His sin He was dealing with. Unbelievable!

Questions:

1. What's harder for you to believe, that Jesus is fully God or fully human?
2. How would you describe 'the whole measure of the fullness of Christ'?

NOTES:

Week Five, Day Six

Ephesians 4:14

"Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming."

Have you ever been to a major college football game?

Not a neutral site game but one that is in a home stadium. If you have been to one of these can you imagine for a moment what the stadium sounds like when a call by the officials goes against the home team? What does it sound like?

Boos, jeers, people pointing at the Jumbotron waiting for the replay. When the replay comes, more shouts and boos.

Now what is true?

In the moment it's like it doesn't matter what's true. The environment that is so lopsided in one direction impacts how we feel about things going on around us. And we, caught up in the moment, can only see and hear what the environment presents to us.

If we were able to watch the same play from home, without a dog in the fight, so to speak, we may just see things totally differently. That call that was so one

sided, may just not be so bad. Or you can see why it was called the way it was called.

We are influenced by things almost constantly on a daily basis. Many of the things that are influencing us we aren't really aware of.

This passage talks about being tossed back and forth in the wind and the waves like an infant. In order to slow the being tossed back and forth by the winds of influence, we have to develop core values that we want to live by.

Infants don't have their own, they have to count on those who are in charge of them to provide them for them. They are merely along for the ride, literally. As adults or even as we are maturing we need to start making personal decisions on what our core values will be.

Some of those we can adopt from our parents, but probably not all of them. Some we will need to create on our own.

These values will give us guard rails so we can't be blown so far off course by the influences around us. These values won't stop people or apps or TV shows from trying to influence us, but it will limit their effectiveness because there will be only so far we can go.

Not everyone we let speak into our lives is for our flourishing. Establishing these values will help us

determine who is on our camp and who is just trying to get something from us.

Questions:

1. Can you think of one part of your life where you used to be heavily influenced outside of yourself and now that's less true?
2. Do you have personal core values?
3. Would you be willing to work on those today?

NOTES:

Week Five, Day Seven

Ephesians 4:15-16

“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. **16** From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

How's your balance?

The older you get the harder it is to maintain good balance. A task, a game or a ride that was at one time easy for us, can become a problem, seemingly overnight.

In this passage Paul is asking us to keep something in balance. He says, “...speaking the truth in love...”

We love speaking the truth. Especially from a right and wrong perspective. If you are wrong, we love to point that out. But if that is how we are functioning then we are missing out on a huge opportunity.

Think about when Jesus was talking with the Samaritan woman at the well in John chapter 4. She was an adulterer, not just in the past but currently. But was Jesus' approach just to shout adulterer at her while she was trying to bring water up from the well?

No. He was trying to show her that she was loved regardless of what her past had been.

Jesus was the King of speaking truth in love. He made sure she knew that He knew what was true in her life. He also made certain she knew He loved even though that was true.

Truth in love.

Are you ready to make this change? Instead of just choosing truth? Instead of ignoring what is true and just loving someone. Can you balance both?

It won't be easy. We will need help. We will need Jesus and the body of believers around us to support us.

Questions:

1. Can you think of a situation that you need to approach by speaking the truth in love?
2. Are you willing to engage that situation with truth and love?

NOTES:

Week Six, Day One

Ephesians 4:17-19 MSG

“And so I insist—and God backs me up on this—that there be no going along with the crowd, the empty-headed, mindless crowd. They’ve refused for so long to deal with God that they’ve lost touch not only with God but with reality itself. They can’t think straight anymore. Feeling no pain, they let themselves go in sexual obsession, addicted to every sort of perversion.”

Has there ever been a better description of a crowd?
“The empty-headed, mindless crowd.”

Crowds gravitate to the lowest common denominator. In Ephesus at the time Paul was writing this, that just happened to be sexual pleasure.

Paul was warning the church that we can’t live like all the Gentiles do. The “crowd” just going after what feels good in the moment. That’s no way to live.

When that’s all you are chasing, it’s easy to get caught up in all sorts of things that are way out of bounds. The lust for more is insatiable. There is no stopping it. Feeding the lust just makes it hungry for more.

But this is where we have found ourselves societally. Everything is okay. Nothing is out of bounds. If it feels good, you should do it and no one should ever be able

to tell you it’s a bad idea. You have the right to do whatever makes you feel good.

That was a dangerous attitude in Paul’s day and it still is now.

Questions:

1. Where have you found yourself caught up as a part of the mindless crowd?

NOTES:

Week Six, Day Two

Ephesians 4:20-24

“That, however, is not the way of life you learned **21** when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. **22** You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; **23** to be made new in the attitude of your minds; **24** and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

Have you been baptized?

The idea of believer baptism is one of making public the dying of your old self and the new life through your transformation in Christ.

A guy named John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, went around before Jesus' ministry started preaching a baptism of the repentance of sins. Repent and be baptized. Wash off the old sins. John was doing this work in the Jordan River, even Jesus took part. Which is really interesting. Jesus didn't have any sins to repent of and He didn't need transformation to happen.

Jesus did it as an example for us to follow. Not that He needed it, but that we would want it.

Dying to our old lives, before Jesus, isn't easy but it is necessary. We can't live with a foot in two worlds. We aren't committed to either.

Jesus wants us to go all in for the new life He offers us through His grace. All in isn't too much to ask for the life we get through Him. It's eternal and can't be taken from us. Ever.

Questions:

1. Have you been baptized?
2. Yes. How do you think about your baptism? What comes to mind when you think about it?
3. No. Why not? Would you consider being baptized?

NOTES:

Week Six, Day Three

Ephesians 4:25-27

“Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. **26** “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, **27** and do not give the devil a foothold.”

Has anyone ever told you not to get angry? “Don’t get angry.” It’s like being angry is bad. Were you taught that?

Paul here makes a clear delineation between anger and sin. In your anger, don’t sin.

You can be angry. Angry is an emotion. Something we feel. We can’t not feel angry. We can stuff the anger. We can pretend it isn’t there and let it simmer under the surface. But that’s not healthy at all.

Anger simmering under the surface can lead to being passive aggressive, fake and disconnected. None of those things are helpful.

Paul also says, do not give the devil a foothold. If we don’t acknowledge our anger and deal with it as best we can, it gives the devil a foothold to control us. He can use our un dealt with anger to stay angry for long periods of time. Anger is an emotion meant to exist in

the moment to protect us and then when it’s properly dealt with we move on and it doesn’t persist.

When we don’t do that, we get stuck in our anger and any little thing can remind us of it and bring us right back to it. Which is us giving up control of our emotions to someone else.

Acknowledging our anger rather than stuffing it can go a long way towards not getting stuck in it.

Questions:

1. Is there something that makes you angry repeatedly? What is it? Can you acknowledge it?
2. Is there some place you can see you are giving the devil a foothold?

NOTES:

Week Six, Day Four

Ephesians 4:28

“Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.”

This verse is such a great example of how the mercy of God works. This would have been a huge change from how the Israelites had been raised. They hadn't grown up expecting mercy. They had grown up in the era of eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth.

If you do something to me, I get to do something back to you. Jesus radically changed that concept. He introduced those who do things wrong not getting what they deserve.

We are all for this when it's us not getting what we deserve. We are less for this when it's someone who has done something to us not getting what they deserve.

In some circles this is known as a double standard. We feel justified in it because we have been wronged and mercy is hard to come by from us. But mercy is what Jesus asks of us.

We can't expect to receive mercy and then not be mercy dealers when it is required of us. When we get to a place where we can give mercy, we can see people who were headed down bad path start to contribute to society in amazing ways.

Just like we have.

Questions:

1. Can you remember a time you experienced receiving mercy?
2. Is there someone you need to extend mercy to?

NOTES:

Week Six, Day Five

Ephesians 4:29-30

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. **30** And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

Words matter. Maybe now more than ever we realize this. With everything we say now living on forever in our social media accounts or in a video someone took of us.

We even now can get in trouble for what we don't say. “Why don't you have an opinion on this topic?” We are supposed to have an opinion on everything, the more radical, the more polarizing the better.

But that isn't how we were designed to function. God showed us that words matter by speaking the universe into existence. He spoke and everything was created. That matters.

Words have immense power. Now our words probably aren't going to create physical things. But words are powerful. And we have to be careful how we wield them.

We are to use words that build others up and benefit those who are listening. Is that how you think about things when you are talking about someone else? That you should build them up and benefit the hearers of what you are saying?

Verse 30 is put this way in the Message:

“Don't grieve God. Don't break his heart. His Holy Spirit, moving and breathing in you, is the most intimate part of your life, making you fit for himself. Don't take such a gift for granted.”

It is valuable for us to remember that God himself dwells within those of us who believe in Jesus as our Savior and Lord.

Are we quick to forget that? Quick to take that unbelievable blessing for granted?

What if we thought about other people like this:

Every human is a child of God; created in the image of God.

Would we be so quick to talk badly about someone who we believed was a child of God, created in His image?

Would be so quick to get ahead at someone else's expense if we remembered this was true?

Questions:

1. What would help you remember that what you say matters even in the heat of the moment?
2. Is there someone in your life you need to be reminded is a child of God, created in the image of God?

NOTES:

Week Six, Day Six

Ephesians 4:31

“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.”

It should be really easy to do what is asked of us in this verse. These all seem like terrible things. Who would want any of these things around or part of our lives?

Is it easy for you?

Can you think of anything you are bitter about? Bitterness is something that sounds easy to get rid of but just like something that tastes bitter, it lingers. Have you ever chewed on an espresso bean? They are bitter.

You can drink water and you still have this lingering bitterness in your mouth. If you try to eat something sweet with your mouth still full of the bitter flavor, the bitter will overpower the sweet, every time.

In our lives, bitterness can be overpowering as well. It touches way more of our lives than we intend. It leaks over the edges we've put in place to control it. It's like a weed that grows rampantly. It gets into places we didn't even think was possible. It goes from being something we are fairly indifferent about to being something we have to do something about. Our

bitterness is the same way.

Eventually it gets to a point we have to do something about it. It's impacting so much of our lives.

What does it take to get rid of our bitterness? Work. Do you know what made you bitter in the first place? Have you done the work to heal that? Will you?

The other things mentioned in this verse are really similar. They impact more than we think they do and it will take some real work in our hearts to be able to lay them down at the feet of Jesus.

Questions:

1. Are you willing to do the work to get rid of bitterness in your life?
2. Where will you start?

NOTES:

Week Six, Day Seven

Ephesians 4:32

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

Do you remember the WWJD bracelet movement? It was probably the late 1990's when it was at it's height. The idea was solid. One was supposed to approach any and every situation by thinking What Would Jesus Do?

That was the easy part. Figuring out what Jesus would do is pretty easy. The hard part is then doing what Jesus would do. Seeing what He would do, understanding that's how I'm supposed approach the same situation and then following through.

That's where things get difficult.

We can be kind most of the time. Especially to your face, kindness is easy. Behind your back, take it or leave it. Compassion that's a bit harder. We often believe people are getting what they deserve so compassion can be fleeting.

But forgiving...

That is always a struggle for us. Before we are ready to forgive, we believe that we deserve justice. The person needs to be punished for what they have done to us.

If they aren't punished then me forgiving them just lets them off the hook like nothing happened.

That's how it feels, but that's not actually how it works. This verse is expertly constructed. It says, "...just as in Christ God forgave you." This is important to remember in this conversation.

We don't want them to get off without punishment, but see Jesus is in the equation. That means that if there is a punishment, Jesus is going to take it for them, just like He did for you. You want someone to pay for what they did to you, so you are slow to forgive. Jesus says, okay, I'll take their punishment.

Is that what you intended? Jesus to take it instead of the person who deserves it? No. But that's what He's done for you. And it's what He's done for them. Forgiving is realizing Jesus has done this for us and He will do it for them as well. We may as well join Him.

Questions:

1. How would you rate your ability to be compassionate on a scale of 1 to 10?
2. Can you think of someone you may need to forgive?

NOTES:

Week Seven, Day One

Ephesians 5:1-2

"Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

Jesus willingly gave up His life for us. He offered himself in our place. Thankfully for us, He was a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. That's a sacrifice that's acceptable to God. Because of His sacrifice, our sins have been atoned for and that allows us to be in relationship with God.

And we are supposed to follow God's example, be imitators of God. What does it look like to walk in the way of love for us? We get it that for Jesus it meant He sacrificed himself for us. But what about for us?

Are we supposed to put others before ourselves? Put the needs of others above our own? That sounds like Jesus. Are we supposed to love sacrificially? Meaning the loving others should cost us something? That sounds like Jesus.

This whole following Jesus things feels costly. "What about me?"

Christ loved us and gave himself up for us...

And it's because this is true that Jesus asks us to respond in love to those around us. Love like Jesus, because He loves us. No one we encounter will deserve sacrificial love, that's the whole point. But that doesn't mean we aren't supposed to love them sacrificially. We are.

There is no way around it. A life following Jesus is filled with sacrifice and challenge. But all that pales in comparison to the glory we will experience in the presence of God for eternity. AKA heaven.

Questions:

1. Do you feel like following Jesus is costly for you?
2. How much is too much?

NOTES:

Week Seven, Day Two

Ephesians 5:3-5

“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. **4** Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. **5** For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.”

Do you read this and think, well that seems a little bit heavy handed? It makes following Jesus seem like a really big deal and the repercussions for not choosing that life seem huge. Isn't there a more moderate version? This appears to be pretty all or nothing?

Fortunately, it is all or nothing. That's fortunate for us. If it was left up to us, we'd fall short of what is required to be reconciled with God for eternity. Thankfully Jesus took that out of our hands. There is no kind of following Jesus. We either are followers of Jesus or we aren't. He knows which is which whether we do or not.

We can be clear on a couple things. It is much better to have an inheritance in the kingdom of God than to be left out of that. There's no doubt about that.

The other thing is there is actual punishment for not being part of the inheritance. Despite reports to contrary, hell is real and people are going to spend eternity there. That's where those who reject God go to.

We have an opportunity to receive the gift God has given to us or reject it. That's the only two options.

Among us there should be thanksgiving for what God has done for us. Can we choose to focus on what God has done rather than focus on what He doesn't allow in His Kingdom?

Questions:

1. Is it possible for the list of things mentioned in the passage to not be found in any of us?
2. What else does Jesus do for us to allow us an inheritance with God?

NOTES:

Week Seven, Day Three

Ephsians 5:6-7

"Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. **7** Therefore do not be partners with them."

Taking responsibility is a huge challenge. We shirk responsibility like it's our job when we are young. That's not mine. I didn't do it. I don't have to. It's not my fault.

God asks us here to take some responsibility. If someone is talking to us with empty words and promises, don't partner with them. If we do that's on us. It's not God's fault, He warned us. If we choose into that relationship knowing they are just full of hot air, then we need to own that.

We have encounters like this all the time, almost to the point where we expect them. Salespeople and politicians have a pass to say things that we know are perhaps empty promises. But the reality is both they and us have a responsibility to make certain that isn't true. If you are a salesperson or in politics, make sure you are only speaking the truth.

Might that impact your immediate results? Maybe, but you'll sleep better. Maybe, but it will definitely

impact your eternity, which is what actually matters.

Questions:

1. Can you think of someone who you are in relationship with you need to hold accountable for speaking empty words?

NOTES:

Week Seven, Day Four

Ephesians 8-11

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light **9** (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) **10** and find out what pleases the Lord. **11** Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.”

This talk of fruit and light makes sense right? There is not fruit when things are dark all the time. In Alaska they have a really interesting growing season. There are periods of darkness there during the winter, in some places, where it isn't really daylight at all for weeks.

But in those same places in the summer, the sun doesn't ever really set, so it's daylight or near daylight all day long.

In the summer when the sun is shining, things grow like crazy. In winter when there is no sun, nothing grows.

Plants that bear fruit need sunlight to do all the things they need to do in order to produce fruit. Regardless of how good the soil is or how well you take care of it, if you have a plant that never sees the light of day, it won't grow.

The same thing happens for folks trying to follow Jesus. Fruit happens when we are trying to live our lives in the light of day. Out with other followers, sharing life.

John, the writer of the book of Revelation, tells us that God is light, so in heaven there will be no need for a sun or a moon because we will be present with God and He will be our light.

As we are following Jesus, the best thing for our growth is to stay close to Him. The closer we stay, the more light we get, the more we produce fruit.

Questions:

1. Do you know how to get and stay close to God?
2. Are you close to Him now?
3. What are you doing to get closer? Stay where you are?

NOTES:

Week Seven, Day Five

Ephesians 5:12-14

“It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. 13 But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. 14 This is why it is said:

“Wake up, sleeper,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

Do you know how light works? Not only are you able to see a light, but because of light you are able to see everything else.

Anything that reflects light allows us to see it. We can't see a black hole because they absorb light. But pretty much anything else can be seen if some light is shed on it.

It doesn't take much light to pierce the darkness. Even the definition of darkness itself is the absence of light. Darkness is just a description of there not being light. Light is the dominant way of being. And that's no surprise coming from God.

He is light. And He helps us see everything also. God gave us eyes and the ability for our eyes to take in light and understand what we are seeing by it.

God has given us the nerve endings that transport information from our eyes to our brains at faster than lightning speeds. We've been given an incredible gift of sight, but the true gift is the light.

God asks us to live in the light. Not to hide in darkness trying to not be seen. That will never work for us. No matter where we go, God will see us there. He knows we will thrive in the light and we'll suffer and die in darkness.

Choose light. Choose to see what God has in store for you.

Questions:

1. Is there something in your life you need to bring out into the light?
2. Do you believe the light of Christ is the best way to heal whatever is troubling you?

NOTES:

Week Seven, Day Six

Ephesians 5:15-18

"Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, **16** making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. **17** Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. **18** Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery."

How can you understand what the will of God is?

Often we can get paralyzed by the seeking of God's will to the point we don't move at all. Not moving at all is probably not God's will. God is on the move. He's making things happen. He's walking ahead of us and asking us to follow Him. How can we figure out where he's going?

The first thing laid out here is do not live as the unwise live. We aren't God, and we may not be able to come up with ideas right now of what is unwise, but we know it when we see it.

There are entire TV shows now filled with people being unwise. Movies even. Unwise we can figure out. What about wise?

That's equally challenging but for a different reason. We can glean the wisdom of God from His Word. We

read it and do what it says. That would be wise. When we are trying to decide if we should do something or not, we can look at the Word and see if it prohibits what we want to do.

We can think, would someone who is unwise do that? If they would, don't do that thing.

Questions:

1. How have you pursued learning the will of God for your life?
2. Is there something God's asking you to do that you are stalling on moving forward with?

NOTES:

Week Seven, Day Seven

Ephesians 5:19-20

"Instead, be filled with the Spirit, **19** speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, **20** always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

How thankful would you say you are? Do you have an expectation to receive certain things because of what you've done or are you thankful for all that you are given?

Everything we have has been given to us by God. Out of His mercy, because of His grace. We haven't earned any of it, but He gives relentlessly.

How do we even start to give Him thanks for that?

It seems like worship is an important part of that.

Are you worshipping regularly? Are you choosing to worship even when you don't feel like? Do you choose to worship when the gifts God has given you aren't the ones you would have chosen for yourself?

This isn't just talking about corporate worship, but personal worship outside of corporate worship times. Worshipping together was assumed, this is a command to worship at all times, in the Spirit, in

thanks to God for all He is and all He has done.

What does worshipping on your own look like?
Singing songs to God? Singing prayers to God?
Reading Scripture out loud? Praying hymns?

Maybe all of those things, what is consistent is that giving thanks to God is all about communicating with Him, out loud. Starting and maintaining a dialogue.

Questions:

1. What's your dialogue with God like these days?
2. Have you worshipped outside of Church before?
3. Are you willing to schedule a time and place to worship on your own during the week?

NOTES: