Cell Group Journal

Loved. Secured. Reconciled

He has... broken down... the dividing wall of hostility

Ephesians 2:14

HOW TO USE THE STUDY

EACH WEEK CONTAINS A SET OF DEVOTIONS MEANT TO BE DONE INDIVIDUALLY ON DIFFERENT DAYS THROUGHOUT THE WEEK. THE TRUTH STATEMENTS OF THE DEVOTIONS EACH WEEK CAN BE COMBINED TO MAKE ONE TRUTH STATEMENT WHICH WILL BE THE FOUNDATION FOR DISCUSSION WITH OTHERS.

WEEKLY STEPS

Fore Each Devotion follow these steps...

Step One | Read the Text: The text is given in the top right hand corner of the first page of each devotion.

Step Two | Read the Devotion: The devotion was written to help you grasp the main point of the text. It does not dive into the details, but only attempts to help you understand what it is saying

Step Three | Answer the "Stop & Think" questions: These questions are crucial for life transformation. Take a minute to reflect. This part is crucial.

Step Four | Respond to God through prayer by "Praising & Thanking Him," "Confession" and "Requests": God's Word initiates our response. This section is a time of structured prayer in which we praise and thank God, confess our sins, and present our requests.

Step Five | Fill out the "Discussion Prep" section and discuss with someone else who is also going through the study.

TIPS FROM THE AUTHOR

1) Do the devotions on different days.

2) Write out your answer to the questions and responses in prayer either in the book or in your own journal.

> 3) Read one of the following books as we study Ephesians.

> > <u>By Grace Alone</u> by Sinclair Ferguson

<u>The Discipline of Grace</u> by Jerry Bridges

<u>Relationships: A Mess</u> <u>Worth Making</u> by Timothy Lane & Paul Tripp

Journal One

WEEK ONE | SEPT. 18 - 24 Ephesians 1:1-23

WEEK TWO | SEPT. 25 - OCT. 1 Ephesians 2:1-10

WEEK THREE |OCT. 2 - 8 Ephesians 2:8-22

WEEK FOUR | OCT. 9 - 15 Ephesians 3:1-21

WEEK FIVE | OCT. 16 - 22 Ephesians 4:1-16

> Journal Two Available Oct. 15

WEEK SIX | OCT. 23 - 29 Ephesians 4:17-32

WEEK SEVEN | OCT. 30 - NOV. 5

Ephesians 5:1-21

WEEK EIGHT | NOV. 6 - 12 Ephesians 5:22-23

WEEK NINE | NOV. 13 - 19

Ephesians 6:1-24

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Ephesians 1:1-23 WEEK ONE GOD HAS BLESSED US

"Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity."

- Ecclesiastes 1:2

Devotion #1 God has blessed us in unwavering love

Devotion #2 God has blessed us by choosing, forgiving, and sealing us.

Devotion #3 God makes known his blessing through the revealing work of the Holy Spirit.

GOD HAS BLESSED US

Read Ephesians 1:1-14

Many well-intending pastors and preachers have attempted to coerce their congregations to faithfulness by presenting God as a terrifying judge ready to zap believers with a burst of lightning or an angry father eager to withhold blessings from His disobedient children. However. the apostle Paul took a different approach. Rather than urging, "Stay faithful so God will bless you," he encourages, "Bless God for God has already blessed you!" Paul believed that the foundation in the life of faithful obedience was security in the freely given love and grace of God. Neither the threat of future punishment nor the promise of future reward had enough power to convert the dead heart of men: however, those who can see the glory of God's love given graciously to them experience a radical redirection of their love from the temporary things of this world toward the beauty and glory of God in Christ.

Faithful obedience flows from security found in the certainty of one's relationship with God rather than un-certainty.

Ephesians 1:1-14

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing. EPHESIANS 1:3

One pastor demonstrated this concept extremely well by using the relationship of a father with his children as an example:

A faithful father does not leave his kids wondering whether or not he loves them. When I have to go away on a trip, I don't say to my kids, 'Daddy will be back soon... or maybe he won't. Maybe I am really not your daddy at all. Maybe my real family lives somewhere else. You'll just have to wait and see if I come back. Sit around and think about that while I'm gone and let that compel you to be better children."

That would not produce love in my children. It might produce a little fear-based obedience, but it's only a matter of time until fear-based obedience turns into father-loathing rebellion (1).

Amazingly, God compels His children to faithfulness by convincing and assuring them of His unwavering love – the love He has so magnificently made known in the sacrificial life and death of Jesus Christ.

God has blessed us... IN UNWAVERING LOVE.

(1) J. D. Greear, <u>Stop Asking Jesus into Your Heart</u> (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2013), 18-19.

Week 1 Devotion 1

STOP AND THINK

In I John 3:16 John wrote that we know true love – the love of God – by looking at the love demonstrated by Jesus at the cross.

Can you identify four characteristics of God's love that he demonstrated in Christ's death? [Example: God loves us before we loved Him] Once Paul concludes his magnificent declaration of God's love and work in chapters 1-3, he argues that those who know the love of God should also love others in the same way (Eph. 5:2). To fail to love others like God loves us is to act contrary to His character. To fail to love is to sin.

Consider the three most significant relationships you currently have. How has your love for them failed to demonstrate the characteristics of God's love you identified earlier?

The love God assures us of in Christ not only demonstrates itself in Christ's death in the past, but it also manifests itself in our present daily lives.

In what ways have the characteristics of God's love that you identified above been experienced in your own life? Our failure to love has less to do with our actions and more to do with the condition of our hearts. If we examine our hearts, we will find our lack of Christ-like love results from various problems of pride, selfishness, ingratitude, bitterness, jealousy, love of pleasure, lack of faith and much more.

What heart problems lie behind your failure to love like Jesus?

PRAISE AND THANKS

Praise God for His unwavering love, and thank Him for the specific ways He has manifested His love in your daily life. CONFESSION

Confess the ways you have failed to love others, and when you are done go ask the one you failed to love for forgiveness. REQUESTS

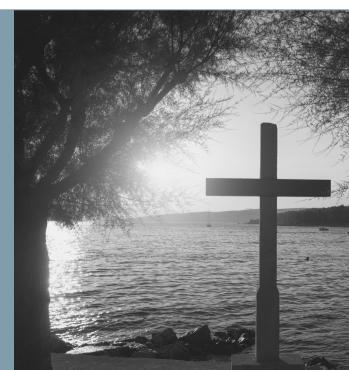
Ask God to purify your heart and to cleanse it from whatever he shows you.

One will scarcely die for a righteous person... but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

ROMANS 5:7-8

Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears us up; God is our salvation.

PSALMS 68:19



GOD HAS BLESSED US

Read Ephesians 1:3-14

The declaration of one's love offers little assurance if the declaration possesses no actions to support its authenticity. With pastoral care, Paul sought to assure the believers of God's love by calling to mind three divine acts.

First, God's love for them originates not only before they existed but before the world existed. He set His love on them before they ever did anything right or good to distinguish themselves from others. Their place in loving relationship with the Father came about because He chose freely to bless them and adopt them (Eph. 1:4 -5). If God set His love on them before they made any contribution or offering, they could be sure that His love would continue, for it originated in God Himself unforced or compelled by anything in them or done by them.

Second, Paul reminds the believer they have been forgiven of sins. Can they be assured of God's love? Of course! Look at the sins God's love had already covered. They once were dead in their sins (Eph. 2:1-3). They once walked as the Gentiles hard and hostile towards God. They were given up "to sensuality," and they were "eager to

Ephesians 1:3-14

In love, he predestined us for adoption... as sons... according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us. EPHESIANS 1:4-6

practice every kind of impurity" (Eph. 4:18-19). They walked in hatred, practiced sensual immorality, coveted what did not belong to them, and spoke deceit with their mouths (Eph. 5:1-6). These only begin to describe the sins of which they were guilty. But, God redeemed them. God forgave them their sins. Do not doubt the love of God. Look at the sin which He has forgiven.

Last, Paul reminded them of God's promised Spirit which came and dwelled within them. The presence of the Spirit in their lives from the moment of salvation secures their future glory and salvation from the wrath of God. Much like future home owners deliver a down payment to the bank to show the rest of the money will certainly come in due time, God has given to us His Spirit as a convincing act of love to assure us that not only the promise of the Spirit but all the promised gifts of grace purchased at the cross will come without fail on their appointed day (Eph. 1:13-14).

Surely, the church can be confident and assured in the love of God. He has chosen us. He has forgiven us. He has sealed us!

God has blessed us... by choosing, forgiving and sealing us.

Week 1 Devotion 2

STOP AND THINK

Unlike God's choosing and God's redeeming, the sealing of the believer's soul by the Spirit bears visible evidence. The authors of Scripture often argue that you can know you have been adopted and forgiven by God because the Spirit bears fruit in your life. Those who possess the Spirit demonstrate "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23).

The Spirit also causes believers to obey willfully, confess their sinfulness and acknowledge the identity of Jesus. The apostle John asserted that if the believer could see such marks of the Spirit in his life, he could be confident he belonged to God, and he could face Jesus without being fearful (I Jn. 4:17).

What evidences of the Holy Spirit do you see in your own life? Try to list three specific and recent examples. If you can see genuine evidence of the Spirit in your life, you can be sure that God has graciously saved and secured you. The evidence of the Spirit in our lives should lead to great confidence - confidence in God and not in ourselves. If we are not careful, we will attribute to ourselves the good works produced in and through us by God (Phil 2:13). The result will be pride, arrogance and increased confidence in self. This pride manifests itself in criticism of those who are not like us, and an underlying assumption that our church, family and community would be much improved if others were more like us.

What works of God in your life most often tempt you to pride and arrogance? On what do you tend to build yourself up?

Paul begged God to increase the believer's understanding of the "breadth... length... height and depth" of God's salvation and their knowledge of His love which "surpasses knowledge" (3:18-19). This knowledge leads to the humble praise of God's glorious grace rather than arrogant praise of man's work.

PRAISE AND THANKS

Praise and thank God for the Spirit He has sent to live in you. Thank Him for the evidence of the Spirit that God has produced in you.

CONFESSION

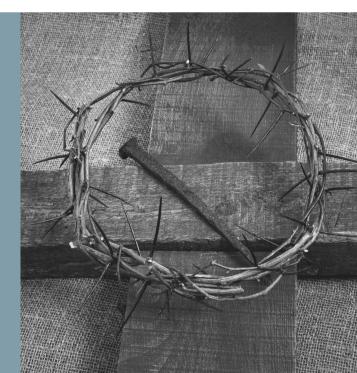
Confess to God your pride and arrogance. Confess your failure to attribute His gracious work in your life to Him and Him alone.

REQUESTS

Ask God to humble you by opening your heart's eyes to see and know the glorious work and love of God. Ask God to do the same in your spouse, your children and your leaders.

Have mercy on me Oh God... cleanse me from my sin! Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me... The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart... you will not despise.

PSALM 51:1-19



GOD HAS BLESS<u>ED US</u>

Read Ephesians 1:15-23

While I drove around the suburbs of Cleveland, Ohio, in my parents' purple mid 90's Ford Thunderbird dreaming of the day I could move out from the tyranny of their kingdom, I sat behind the steering wheel blinded to the gracious love of Mom and Dad. Sure, I would have told you they loved me. I knew they did. But my understanding of their love was shallow at best. My Limited view of their love led me to doubt their goodness and rebel against their instructions.

Now that I am in my thirtie with a wife and four children of my own, the love of my mom and dad has come into a much clearer view. Their decisions and actions I once resented, I now value. If only I could have seen their love as a teenager with greater clarity, surely my decisions would have been much wiser and my relationship with them more joy-filled.

Paul knew that if the believers in Ephesus would persevere in faithfulness to their loving Father, their understanding of His magnificent love must increase (Eph. 4:17-24). Because of this, he asked God to give them the ability to see the greatness of all God did in love through Christ to bless them. This knowledge of God is revealed in

Ephesians 1:15-23

May [God] give you theSpirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your heart enlightened.

EPHESIANS 1:17-18

the gospel. Paul did not desire for the believers to learn new facts but to see with greater clarity the beauty and glory of the message already declared to them in the gospel of Jesus.

This greater understanding of God, His love and His glorious work comes only from God. Paul's glorious and clear statement of God's love would do nothing to increase the affection of the reader toward his Father unless the words he wrote were accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit who gives wisdom and knowledge. In humble dependence, Paul turned to the Father and petitioned Him to shine the light of the gospel of Jesus into the hearts of his readers, so they might faithfully walk in love-motivated obedience (Eph. 1:17).

God makes known the glory of His blessing... THROUGH REVELATION BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Week 1 Devotion 3

STOP AND THINK

When Paul tried to compel believers to faithfulness, he did so by declaring the gospel while trusting God to reveal the value of Christ to the reader. Paul knew from his own experience that only those who treasured Christ supremely will endure the loss of all things in this world. Faithfulness depends on one's preferring Christ over all else. Those who know Christ will count everything else as loss. (Phil. 3:7-8).

How has your knowledge and understanding of God and the gospel grown since the day God saved you? will build their strategy on clear articulation of the gospel and humble dependence on God in prayer.

Can you name three individuals you have a strong desire to see grow in their discipleship? Consider your children, coworkers, spouse, classmates, and friends.

When is the last time you discussed the work of Christ – the gospel – with them, and how often do you ask God to give them eyes to see?

How could you declare the gospel to them more frequently and more clearly?

How has this affected the way you feel towards Him?

If you are like Paul, you also desire to see those around you walk faithfully in truth, righteousness and wisdom. You too long for others to be delivered from sin and unwavering in obedience to the Father. This is the desire of all who set out to make disciples. Wise disciple makers will model their discipleship like the apostle Paul; they Elsewhere in Scripture Paul claims that through the foolishness of preaching the gospel men are saved and transformed. Reasonably, men often lose confidence in the gospel message and turn to other methods and means to bring about life change. They try accountability partners, twelve-step programs, counseling, behavior modification techniques, fear and/or the prospect of reward.

If we will see our churches become communities faithful to God, we must once again place our confidence in the gospel message and return our hearts to a humble dependence on His grace.

PRAISE AND THANKS

Praise God for the truths about Himself which He has revealed to you. Thank Him for graciously giving you eyes to see and faith to believe.

CONFESSION

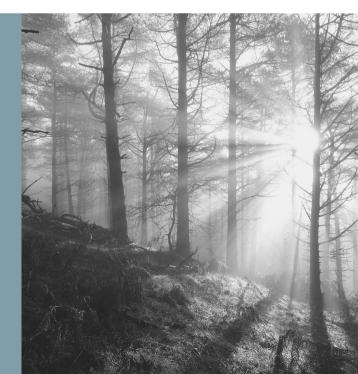
Confess your failure to seek gospel change in others without declaring and discussing the gospel. Confess your lack of humility which shows itself in a lack of crying out to God to give sight.

REQUESTS

Ask God to increase your confidence in the gospel message not just to produce believers but also to bring believers into maturity. Ask God to humble you in His presence.

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:6



Ephesians 2:1-10 WEEK TWO GOD HAS SAVED US

Devotion #1 God has saved us from His wrath, our sin, and Satan's domain.

Devotion #2 God has saved us with great mercy, love, power, and authority

GOD HAS SAVED US

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

In the age of information, news constantly lands on the runways of our brains. The TV, the radio, e-mail, social media, podcasts, and google searches inform us of everything from riots in a major city to an acquaintance's frustration with slow service at a fast-food restaurant. I have noticed that when scrolling through posts or articles, I click on those posts that offer something praiseworthy or relevant to me.

For Paul, the news that God has graciously chosen, forgiven and secured His people in and through Christ is both praiseworthy and relevant (1:3, 6, 12, 15). Unfortunately, the details of God's saving work often fail to stir up interests in professing believers. In many, the record of salvation stirs up cursing and hostility toward God rather than praise and affection. Even if one does not see Paul's gospel as offensive, many see it as irrelevant, unimportant and non-essential to the Christian life.

As a result, many scroll through chapters 1-3 of Ephesians to get to the "relevant" instructions of chapters 4-6. To combat the hostility and/or lack of interest, Paul shifts perspective from the seemingly distant eternal view of God's saving work to the near and present experience of salvation by those who believe.

Ephesians 2:1-3

You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, and [you] were by nature children of wrath. EPHESIANS 2:1-3

In Paul's mind, being amazed by grace begins in understanding who we were apart from it. Before we were believers, we were dead in sin. Understanding our former deadness in sin can be difficult, but Paul helps us by identifying being dead as "Following the course of this world... and the prince of the power of the air" (2:2).

According to biblical thinking, the world operates in a way of life driven by desires. The world experiences the cravings of the flesh. They look with their eyes to determine what will satisfy their desires and then they seek to secure it and the satisfaction they hope it will bring (I Jn. 2:15-17).

This worldly way is consistent with the darkness cast by Satan (6:12; 2 Cor. 4:3-4). With their eyes blind to the glory, beauty and satisfaction only Christ can offer, those who are dead hopelessly get carried through life by one fleshly desire after another (2:3; 4:17-24). Being blind to the knowledge of God and seeing that creation is good, they position themselves in opposition to the Lord as they worship and serve the creation rather than its Creator (Rom. 1:24). In doing so, they store up for themselves wrath on the day of judgement (2:3; 5:6).

God has saved us... FROM HIS WRATH, OUR SIN, AND SATAN'S DOMAIN.

STOP AND THINK

When salvation by God comes to an unbeliever all three levels of hopelessness are reversed. God removes His wrath from them. God opens their eyes to the truth. God frees them from their fleshly desires. Therefore, they no longer walk as the world walks (Eph. 4:17). Rather than being carried about by their old desires for the things of this world, they are now driven by a desire for the glory of God. They walk not as the dead but as those who have been given life (Eph. 2:4, 10). Those who have experienced this redirection of desire from creation to Creator can be sure their salvation is secure.

Have you experienced this redirection of your desires from creation toward God? How do you know?

How has your new love for God changed the way you live?

What desires of your own heart most often rival your desire for God?

On what two people or things do you direct most of your time, energy and resources?

Often, we fail to see the magnificent glory of God's saving grace because we fail to see the desperate and hopeless situation from which he rescued us. In pride, we minimize our need for a Savior leading us to reduce God's role in our salvation from glorious Savior to mere assistant or helper. We can know pride has crept into our hearts when our worship fades – our joy gives way to misery, our thanksgiving gives way to complaining, our praising gives way to cursing, and our awe gives way to indifference.

What is your level of joy, and how passionate is your worship?

Pride kills worship. What might the condition of your worship, praise and love for God reveal about your level of pride?

While God's salvation delivers believers from Satan's domain of darkness and the heart's desires for this world, both still rage war against the Holy Spirit at work within us.

PRAISE AND THANKS

Praise God for His grace, mercy and love. If you can see His saving work in your life, you certainly have much to praise Him for!

CONFESSION

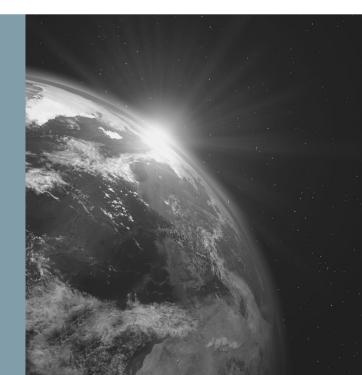
Confess to God any desires of your heart that pull you away from faithfulness to Him.

REQUESTS

Ask God to increase your joy in His salvation by humbling you. Ask him to let you see yourself accurately. Ask Him to increase your understanding of the hopeless condition from which He rescued you!

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

I JOHN 2:15-17



GOD HAS SAVED US

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

Growing up my family had two TVs but only seven channels. None of us watched much television, but I remember all of us gathering around to watch two shows as a family – Home Improvement and Rescue 9-1-1. Each episode of Rescue 9-1-1 dramatized real-life stories of those rescued from hopeless situations of great danger and possible death. The show found success because people love standing in awe of heroes. They find great joy in seeing one bring about salvation, and the joy in seeing such heroic acts only intensifies as the hopelessness of the situation grows.

Much like the beginning of each *Rescue* 9-1-1 story, Paul's telling of the gospel began with the hopeless condition of unbelievers who lived "with no hope and without God" (2:12). From this hopeless situation, he abruptly transitioned to the God who saves. As one beholds the saving work of God, several praiseworthy attributes of the Savior become apparent.

First, God is rich in mercy. One might expect a man to risk his life to rescue an innocent child and mother from the threat of a terrorists, but no one would expect a

Ephesians 2:4-10

But God, being rich in mercy [and] because of His great love... made us alive together with Christ.

man to jeopardize his own innocent blood to spare the life of a suicide bomber. Why? Because we rightfully think murderers deserve death. However, the God rich in mercy stepped out of heaven to rescue not the guiltless but the guilty.

Second, God possesses great love. I struggle to love my wife as I should, even though she has loved me well with much faithfulness. Thankfully, God's love for me infinitely surpasses my love for her. My heart is anything but faithful to Him. Rather than humble and loving service, He received from me hostile rebellion. Yet, even in our sin, God loves His people.

Third, God saves us with great power! Sinners need much more than assistance, a second chance or opportunity. Enslaved to the flesh and in bondage to Satan, they need to be radically changed. If God only forgave sins but did nothing to change the sinner, our lives would remain without any hope of improvement. We would continue to walk in darkness carrying out our heart's desires and reaping the destruction that follows. Thankfully, God powerfully replaces our dead hearts with a new heart full of love for Him (Ezek. 36:26).

God has saved us... with great mercy, love, power and authority

Week 2 Devotion 2

Finally, God's saving work displays His authority over all things. Even the spiritual forces including Satan himself bow down to the King. Not only does he sit on the throne above all, but in Christ, God has also elevated the believer to share in His reign and rule. Believers are free from the bondage of the evil one. Through Christ, they are more than conquerors, for greater is He that dwells in them than He that is in the world.

STOP AND THINK

If you are a believer, God has mercifully, lovingly, powerfully and authoritatively rescued you from the hopeless condition in which you once lived.

When you consider the way God rescued you from sin and darkness, which of these four characteristics – mercy, love, power and authority – stands out to you most clearly? Why? Is there any particular person to whom you struggle to show kindness? If so, what would being kind to him/her look like today?

In love, God sought our joy even though it cost him his life. We too should passionately pursue the interest, wellbeing, benefit and joy of others. Sinfully we tend to evaluate an event, meeting, or day based on how much we benefited or took away from it rather than considering whether or not we were used to benefit those around us.

Consider your closest relationships; how have you failed to love like Jesus this week?

God has the power to radically transform any sinner.

Is there a particular person or group you struggle to see how they could ever change?

God has raised us up in victory over sin, death and evil; therefore, we have the ability to rejoice in the greatest struggles against the sin inside of us and the darkness outside of us.

Which of your particular sins or difficulties constantly rise up to challenge your sense of victory God has already won in your life?

We, the believers, have been saved by the God rich in mercy. He shows kindness to us even though we have not been kind. He has spared us His just wrath and the right judgment of our offenses.

Week 2 Devotion 2

PRAISE AND THANKS

Praise God for each of these four attributes. Thank Him for at least one way you have experienced each of these four attributes of God recently.

CONFESSION

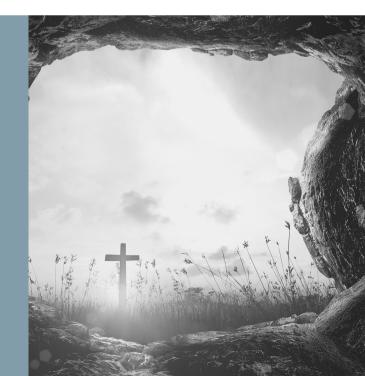
Confess to God your sin by acknowledging your failure to show mercy and love. Confess your lack of faith in His power to change others, and acknowledge to your Father your failure to live by faith in the victory He has already given you.

REQUESTS

Ask God to make you more like Himself by making you more merciful and more loving. Ask Him to give you faith to trust His power to save others and trust the victory He has achieved with great power and authority on your behalf.

[God] saved us, not because of works done by us,... but according to His own mercy.

TITUS 3:5



Ephesians 2:8-22 WEEK THREE GOD HAS RECONCILED US (PART ONE)

Devotion #1 God has reconciled us by humbling us.

Devotion #2 God has reconciled us to each other by reconciling us to Himself.

GOD HAS RECONCILED

US

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

In a world of rivalry and division, the art of boasting is a necessary skill; after all, we live in a culture that has adopted Darwin's doctrine. "The Survival of the Fittest." With a religious background, our American culture certainly would not call our cut-throat approach to self-advancement as "boasting." Even in a morally decaying society, arrogance and pride remain taboo. We prefer the terms "marketing," "selling yourself" or "putting your best foot forward." The world's system of rivalry and competition encourages everyone to cover their faults, failures and weaknesses while highlighting their strengths, gifts and talents as they fight to gain acceptance from someone. This produces a culture infected by hostility and emptied of love.

When God saves His people, He does so in such a way that He shatters all grounds of boasting or self-exultation. In view of their former hopeless condition and the mighty work of salvation brought about by the Savior, believers are left to boast in nothing but Christ. This seems like a natural conclusion, but Paul follows the record of salvation with an attack on any residue of pride that might remain in the believer.

If one tried to identify the most basic element or requirement for salvation and the Christian life he would most likely and

Ephesians 2:8-10

By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is a gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. EPHESIANS 2:8-9

rightly identify faith. An overview of Scripture clearly distinguishes God's people by their faith or belief. Those with faith have life while those who do not believe remain dead. "Without faith it is impossible to please [God], for whoever would draw near to God must believe..." (Heb. 11:6). By faith Abraham was declared righteous in the sight of God. Examples of faith distinguishing the saved from the unsaved are so numerable in Scripture we need not mention any more.

To combat pride, Paul makes clear that faith, the fundamental and distinguishing mark of God's children. comes to us from God as a gift. Attributing our faith to the good and gracious work of God is not uncommon in the Scriptures. It is God's powerful work by the Sprit to bring about faith that marks those who respond to the gospel with belief and repentance rather than continued hostility and hardness. This faith given to us by God does not simply jump start the life of the believer, but it fuels the work of faith (I Thess. 1:3-5). In ignorance, unbelievers walk about carrying out the works of the flesh, but God's people now live by faith in the truth (Eph. 4:18). By faith they walk in the good works God has prepared for them (Eph. 2:10). All believers must humbly acknowledge no grounds for boasting can be found in themselves. All distinguishing marks of the believer must be attributed to the gracious and powerful work of God!

God has reconciled us... BY HUMBLING US

Week 3 Devotion 1

The Scriptures teach that God designed salvation so that it excludes boasting in man and leads to praise of God on account of His glorious grace. Sometimes in Scripture, we encounter two seemingly contradictory realities. In many passages, God commands or invites us to believe, while in others He takes full credit for any faith we might possess. Indeed, those who believe must do so actively and willfully; however, the believer must not allow this reality to prevent him from acknowledging and confessing that apart from the gracious work of God he would have remained faithless.

STOP AND THINK

Do you have saving faith? Y / N $\,$

How has this faith changed your lifestyle for the good?

on account of our "good works." We have a tendency to attribute the work God is doing in and through us to ourselves. This leaves us frustrated, impatient, unloving, and unforgiving toward other believers who keep failing to be more like us.

What imperfections in others tend to leave you frustrated?

What characterizes the people you find the hardest to love?

Although God's salvation comes to us as a gift and excludes boasting, those in the church often exult themselves over others. Sometimes we exult ourselves over nonbelievers. Rather than humbly acknowledging we would be just as they are apart from God, we arrogantly act and think we are somehow superior to the "sinners" of this world. At the same time, we have a tendency to exult ourselves over each other

Often the things we find most frustrating and unlovable in others are the very things we stand on to exult ourselves as superior.

In the life of a Christian, the height of our praise and worship of God reflects the depths of our humility. As we see our humble condition in sin with greater clarity, we worship and praise the Father, our Savior, with greater passion and joy.

Week 3 Devotion 1

PRAISE AND THANKS

Praise God for His glorious grace which He has shown you. Thank Him for granting you the gift of faith.

CONFESSION

Confess to God your sin of boasting in self.

NOTE: Often, we have become skilled in hiding our boasting under layers of false humility. If you cannot immediately recognize on what you build your pride, sit patiently and ask God to show you the true contents of your heart.

REQUESTS

Ask God to elevate your praise of His glorious grace by elevating your awareness of the sin and darkness from which He has delivered and continues to deliver you.

O to grace how great a debtor Daily I'm constrained to be!

Let thy goodness like a fetter Bind my wandering heart to thee.

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love;

Here's my heart Lord take and seal it, Seal it for thy courts above.

FROM "COME THOU FOUNT OF EVERY BLESSING"



GOD HAS RECONCILED US

Read Ephesians 2:11-22

In no way am I a geologist, but my elementary school education has equipped me with a basic understanding of earthquakes. Most come as the result of friction, division and collision along the fault lines of the earth's crust. While the violent collisions occur below the surface and hidden from the human eye, their power and affects are felt and seen. Earth's landscape undergoes significant change. Holes are formed. Mountains rise. Skyscrapers fall. The fracturing and conflicting below the surface produce devastation on the surface.

In the Scriptures, we learn that our broken and fractured relationship with God leads to devastating effects. Like an earthquake, the initial point of collision between man and God occurs below the surface, deep within the heart (Rom. 8:1-6). Our wills rival His will. Our wisdom rivals His wisdom. Our glory rivals His glory. While the heart's hostility toward God cannot be seen with the eye, it produces many visible effects. Man's division, hostility, and conflict with God are felt and seen in man's division, hostility, rivalry and conflict with one another.

In both the Old and New Testaments of Scripture, the primary example of hostile human relationship was between Jew

Ephesians 2:11-22

He himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.

EPHESIANS 2:14

and Gentile. They despised each other. The relationship experienced great hostility on many fronts including race, religion, tradition, theology and morality. The apostle Paul acknowledged this division by mentioning the derogatory label the Jews had placed on the Gentiles, "the uncircumcision" (2:11). The label communicated to the Gentiles, "You are not us. You are inferior. You are less." God had graciously given the Jews many gifts – the Law, the prophets, the temple and the covenants of promise (2:12; see also Rom. 9:4-5). Rather than humbly receiving these gifts and using them to bless the Gentiles as God intended (Gen. 12:1- 3), the Jews assumed God's blessing affirmed their superiority. Pride and arrogance set the Jews against God and the Gentiles.

Thankfully, the gospel of God's work in Jesus does not just radically change the individual (2:1-10), but it also changes the community. In the gospel, one finds the solution not only to the Jew and Gentile conflict, but also to every human conflict regardless how great or small. The gospel brings peace to the great conflict below the surface in our hearts. In Christ the wrath of God towards His people is removed, and in love He comes to us and announces, "Peace!" God moves us from enemy to friend. He replaces our hostility with love. Just as the disruption of our relationship with God led to disruption

God has reconciled us... to each other by reconciling us to himself.

Week 3 Devotion 2

of all our human relationships, so now the restoration of peace between us and God leads to restoration of peace between us and man. He takes two men hostile and divided and creates one new man knitted together in unity.

Rivalry, division and conflict always arise out of feelings of desire and need (Jam. 4:1-3). We want what we don't have, or we want to maintain what we do have. Everyone who threatens to take what we have or prevent what we want becomes the enemy. Only the gospel of peace can overcome such rivalry and division in our human relationships. For in the gospel, believers have been given every spiritual blessing. They have all they could need or want in Christ. The Father who possesses all things has adopted them. The king without rivals has secured them as citizens in His kingdom. And the God of all glory, beauty and pleasure has chosen them as His dwelling place!

STOP AND THINK

Have you been reconciled to God?

Write down three words that describe your relationship with God before He saved you and three words that describe your relationship with Him now. In the same way warm air blowing through the A/C vents on a hot day indicates a need to address a problem within the A/C unit, relational conflict, rivalry and division indicate a need to deal with issues in our hearts. These things arise because we want what we cannot secure. The resentment, bitterness, ill-will and even indifference we feel toward others indicate a lack of faith in God. These show that we have taken our eyes off Him who can satisfy and secure, and we have turned to this world in the hope of finding what only He can offer.

Is there a professing believer toward whom you have negative feelings?

Maybe your division does not show itself in hatred but indifference.

Of whom do you struggle to seek the good? If you struggle to think of someone, begin calling to mind those who have hurt you most. Then, evaluate how passionately you seek their good.

Each of us experiences rivalry, division and conflict in every arena of life. Some linger for years, while others take only a few minutes to resolve. Sometimes we are in conflict, and sometimes we watch those we love injure each other as they seek their own interests. In each case, reconciliation comes through the gospel of peace. This is the answer and remedy.

Week 3 Devotion 2

PRAISE AND THANKS

Praise God for graciously bringing you into a peaceful relationship with Himself. Thank Him for being your Father and King.

CONFESSION

Confess to God the and/or hostility. ill-will indifference. he has exposed through the questions above. Confess your pursuit of earthly things and the negative effects it has on your human relationships.

REQUESTS

Ask God to bring reconciliation to the broken relationships He has brought to your attention. Ask Him to satisfy your heart and give you enough faith to rest secure in Him.

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

PHILIPPIANS 1:9-11



SERMON NOTES

Ephesians 3:1-21 WEEK FOUR GOD HAS RECONCILED US (PART TWO)

Devotion #1 God has reconciled us through ministers of reconciliation.

> **Devotion #2** God has reconciled us for His glory..

GOD HAS RECONCILED US

Read Ephesians 3:1-13

Not long after the church exploded onto the scene at Pentecost (Acts 2), opposition from religious Jews began to stir and intensify. They sought to silence, restrain and even kill those who preached the gospel of peace. One of the most passionate religious Jews "punished [the believers] often... and in raging fury... [he] persecuted them." When the church's first martyr experienced death by stoning, this leader stood by giving approval and cast his vote in favor of the execution (Acts 26:10-11). While his religious resume surpassed all others, hatred and hostility toward God and His people dominated his heart. This religious leader has become known to all generations of the church as the apostle Paul, and his radical transformation from hatred to love, from pride to humility and from fury to grace remains a monument of God's powerful gospel and its ability to bring about unimaginable change.

When God appeared to Paul and converted him from sinner to saint, he appointed him to a specific task. God sent him to the Gentiles to declare to them the gospel of peace. Through the gospel preached by Paul, God freed the Gentiles from darkness and the power of Satan. He forgave their sins and united them with God's people (Acts 26:18).

Ephesians 3:1-13

Of this gospel I [Paul] was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of His power.

God responded to the hostility and division between Jews and Gentiles by saving and sending Paul as His messenger. Through the message of peace preached to both Jews and Gentiles, those divided became united together as "fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise" (Eph. 3:6). Paul summarized not only his specific call but also the calling of all believers as the ministry of reconciliation." Being at peace with God, he understood his mission as compelling others to be reconciled to God and each other (2 Cor. 5:16-21).

In 2006, I arrived on the campus of North Greenville University with a heart hard toward God, bitter toward His church and set on pursuing a career in engineering. By grace, God placed Mike Landrum, the leader of the Youth Ministry program, into my life. God used Mike's classes and eventual friendship to reshape my understanding of God and His gospel.

Through Mike's ministry at NGU, God began to remove my hostility toward Him. Mike both taught and demonstrated the gospel before me, and through a greater understanding of the gospel, God became increasingly glorious and desirable in my eyes. As my relationship with God grew in love and peace, my

God has reconciled us... Through ministers of Reconciliation.

bitterness and anger toward the church began to subside. Through the ministry of Mike, I have become reconciled both to God and His church.

STOP AND THINK

Whom has God used in your life to directly influence and grow your love for God and the church? of divided people to proclaim the truth and work toward unity.

Where do you see division? Consider your home? Church? Workplace? Community? World?

What sets this person apart from others?

Have you ever thought of discipleship as a "ministry of reconciliation"?

My mentor Mike and the apostle Paul shared two qualities with Jesus Christ, the ultimate minister of reconciliation. First, they got involved. They committed themselves to see reconciliation even when their effort would involve great suffering. Second, they sought unity by proclaiming the truth rather than muting it. They sought peace by addressing issues rather than ignoring them.

Like Jesus, Paul and Mike, we too are surrounded by division as men and women seek their own interests. Parents neglect their children, spouses compete for control in the home, children despise their parents' correction, politicians attack each other on social media, and church members cannot agree on paint colors. Division is everywhere.

Mistakenly, we often try to maintain some false sense of peaceful unity by obscuring the truth rather than speaking it. Rather than getting involved, we prefer to stay isolated in our bubble wrapped safety zones. The ministry of reconciliation requires believers to enter the messy lives Do you avoid getting involved as a minister of reconciliation? Y / N

How should the gospel shape what you say and what you do in the relationships you identified?

As always, failure to act in obedience to God originates in the heart. The selfishness and pride that lead others to division and hostility are the same pride and selfishness that prevent our getting involved. Coming alongside a couple on the verge of divorce will certainly disrupt our evenings and weekends. Confronting racial division for the sake of reconciliation may not be popular among the political party with which we identify. Caring for abandoned children will require great sacrifice. The ministry of reconciliation requires that our "I'll pray for you," be accompanied by, "How can I help you?" Division and hostility have left those around us alienated. If we will enter the brokenness as ministers of reconciliation, our prideful selfishness must be laid aside.

PRAISE AND THANKS

Praise God for raising up ministers of reconciliation. Thank Him for sending the person you mentioned above into your life.

CONFESSION

Confess to God vour failure to pursue reconciliation. Confess your lack of faith in the gospel to bring about change. Confess vour unwillingness to get involved.

REQUESTS

Ask God to kill your pride and remove any fear of men you may have. Ask Him to replace vour selfishness with selflessness. Ask him to fill your heart with genuine love for others. Ask Him to give you boldness to declare the gospel with clarity to those living in isolation and alienation.

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;

2 CORINTHIANS 5:18



GOD HAS RECONCILED US

Ephesians 3:14-21

Read Ephesians 3:14-21

In the first book of the Bible, Adam and Eve broke fellowship with God. Their disunity with God led to disunity with each other, and the disunity they experienced spread to all their offspring. Murder, betrayal, deception, rape, adultery, manipulation, human trafficking and much more can be found in the book of Genesis.

In the last book of the Bible, we get a glimpse into the future. Every nation, tribe and tongue stand around God's throne in unified praise. Together in peace they live in the presence of God; He is their God and they are His people. In heaven, no one sheds a tear, for all has been restored to the day before sin infected the human heart and disfigured human community.

Paul did not have the benefit of reading the book of Revelation as we do, but His certainty of future restoration to human fellowship with God and man was no less firm. He knew that in time, God would fully unite all things in Christ both in heaven and on earth (Eph 1:8- 10). The brokenness and pain of Genesis will one day give way to the glory, unity, peace and love of Revelation. Amazingly Paul's certainty in the work of God moved him to not only work hard but also to pray. His prayer helps us know how we also should pray as believers waiting To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. EPHESIANS 3:21

for the days described in Revelation. In his prayer, we find several items worthy of our attention.

First, he prayed that the hope of future community would begin to come true in the present. God does not simply save and seal His people for the future; instead, He is actively building, uniting, and reconciling the community of believers right now. The future community in Revelation comes not with a snap of the fingers. By design, God brings about the restored, reconciled community as the dawning of the sun slowly dispels the darkness of the night.

Second, Paul asked that the believers grow in knowledge of God's love. Eve sinned when Satan caused her to doubt God's love. The same has been true of all sin since. At the foundation of a sinful and fractured community lies a lack of trust in the limitless love of God. If God loves you, you are secure. You are satisfied. If he does not, you must look out for yourself. Unified community only exists among those rooted in the soil of God's love.

Third, Paul prayed with amazing expectation. He prayed to the God who has power to bring healing, restoration and reconciliation to the most hostile relationships. If God can reconcile the man responsible for executing the church, who is beyond hope?

God has reconciled us... FOR HIS GLORY.

Last, Paul ministered and prayed with the praise of God's glory as his desired end. His pursuit of reconciliation was one with his pursuit of God's glory. What better displays the goodness, love, power and glory of God than a community united in loving relationship rid of hostility, conflict, division and hatred. When His people stand as a counterculture of love, peace and unity, they sit as a city on a hill illuminating the darkness.

I'll never forget hearing for the first time as a young teenager my brother-in-law's testimony of God's reconciling work between his mother and father. They divorced while he was very young. His mom raised him and his brother alone until they were grown. Many days of his childhood he prayed to God asking Him to return his father. Amazingly, God did so. He brought reconciliation well over a decade later. He took their hostile relationship and brought peace. Through their reconciliation, the God of glory received much praise.

STOP AND THINK

Can you think of any instances in which God has replaced hostility peace and unity?

What good has come from the new relationship of peace and unity?

How has God's reconciling work in your own life changed your relationships? Consider your church? home?

What good has come from the increasing levels of peace and unity you are experiencing.

All of us recognize this world is broken. The relationships we expect to bring us the most joy often bring us the most pain. We all turn to something or someone for help to fix the brokenness. Paul's understanding of God and His work drove him to act and pray.

What role should prayer have in your work of reconciliation in your own life and in the life of others?

If we take Paul's prayer as a model for our own, how should your prayers be changed or improved?

Thankfully we serve a God who can do far more than we can ask or imagine. No one is beyond hope. No relationship is irreconcilable, for God is able.

Week 4 Devotion 2

PRAISE AND THANKS

Praise God for His faithfulness. love and power. Thank Him for working to bring you into peaceful, unified and loving relationship with others. Thank Him for any of specific example reconciliation you have seen in others.

CONFESSION

Confess to God your misplaced faith and confidence. Confess your failure to turn to Him in prayer for help as you seek to find solutions to the division and brokenness in your own life and the lives of others.

REQUESTS

Ask God for faith. Ask Him to increase your confidence in Him. Ask Him to cause you to pray more often and pray more correctly. If you ask anything according to His will, He will surely do it!

"[I (Jesus) pray]...for those who will believe in me ... that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one..."

JOHN 17:20-22



SERMON NOTES

SERMON NOTES

Ephesians 4:1-16 WEEK FIVE GOD IS MATURING US

Devotion #1 God is maturing us over time.

Cod is maturing us - the whole church..

GOD IS MATURING

US

Read Ephesians 4:1-16

Several springs ago, my oldest daughter, a four year old at the time, constructed a small raised garden bed in the back yard. As we cut the boards and screwed them together, I explained to her how we had gone and bought a few tomato, cucumber, squash and pepper plants which had just sprouted. I told her how one day these plants will grow and produce the tasty vegetables we love. She and I both grew in excitement as our conversation stirred up anticipation.

Once the bed was ready, we filled it with soil and fertilizer. Then we planted each one carefully in its precise location in the bed. After watering the small plants, Allie helped me turn off the water spigot, and then she asked, "Tomorrow, can I pick the tomatoes?" Careful not to crush her excitement, I explained how we had to spend several weeks watering, nourishing and pruning the plants so they will grow strong and healthy. Only when the plants mature would they fulfill the hope with which we had planted them.

In a sense, Paul had a similar conversation with the church at Ephesus. In chapters 1-3, Paul wrote about the amazing salvation and life believers have in Christ. He wrote about their future glory. He prayed they would know the hope they have. He

Ephesians 4:1-16

Until we all attain to the unity of faith...to mature manhood, [and] to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ... EPHESIANS 4:13

reminded them that God had chosen them, redeemed them and secured them. In a sense, the saving and glorifying work of God was already complete, for God will not fail to see His will and purpose accomplished. However, the certainty of the church's future does not negate the process God has chosen to bring us to our final state of glory.

Rather than in an instant, God has chosen to bring us to maturity over time. He plants His Word within us and like the small plants in our garden, His Word must be watered, nurtured and developed. Only over time and with much care and attention will the church grow up into maturity. Yes, God has chosen His people in the past. Yes, He has redeemed them in Christ. Yes, He has secured their future glory by the Holy Spirit. No, they have not yet obtained maturity. Thankfully, God has a plan, and He has provided the means by which He will bring His church to maturity.

In future devotions, we will look at how God brings the church into maturity, but for now it is helpful to simply acknowledge that He is now doing so. We are moving from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor. 3:18). We are being conformed to the image of His Son. We are growing into "the unity of the faith" and "to mature manhood" until we attain the "measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

God is maturing us...

Week 5 Devotion 1

Often, we think of spiritual growth in individual terms – "I am growing" or "She/ He is growing." But, in this text Paul refers to the church as a collective whole being built up by God. If we are His church we can expect to see signs of growth.

STOP AND THINK

Since you joined your church, how has it grown- in what ways does it better reflect the character of Christ? Consider even more closely your small group. practices. Other changes may be much greater and completely shift what we do. In either case, the church must remember we are God's and He is actively bringing us into maturity. Let us not grow complacent and comfortable. Let us repent, change and reach forward toward greater maturity.

What weaknesses do you see in your church?

What could you do to actively help the church grow in the areas you identified?

What has kept you from doing more to see growth in these areas?

Since God is growing up the church into maturity, we must not become complacent with the growth we have already experienced. Surely God has done great things in the past to bring us into the present. At the same time, we have much progress to make. If we are not careful, we will adopt the mentality of one needing to protect, maintain and defend our current position rather than repent, change and reach forward to greater Christ likeness. We must live with the assumption we remain stained by sin and need repentance. A church that practices repentance will be a church that undergoes change. Some changes needed might be small and within current structures of programs and

In my own life, I have found several heart issues that drive my unwillingness or lack of urgency to pursue growth in the body. Selfishness causes me to resist any change to what I see as beneficial for me. When I am selfish it matters little if changes will lead to greater benefit for others. Along with selfishness, pride keeps me blind to the fact change is needed. When I examine myself and the ministries in which I am involved, I see only the good. In pride, all who represent differing views must be wrong and must be stopped. My pride stops me from asking, "Could I be the wrong one? Could I be the one who needs to think or act differently?"

Week 5 Devotion 1

PRAISE AND THANKS

Praise God for patiently transforming us. Thank Him for the growth you have seen in the church, because these changes are His work.

CONFESSION

Confess to God your reluctance to change. Confess your lack of urgency to help lead the church to greater maturity.

REQUESTS

Ask God for humility. Ask Him to give you the mind of Christ who looks not at His own interests but also the interests of others. Ask Him to show you why you lack urgency to pursue the growth of the church. Ask Him to show you what you can do to help the church grow.

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

PHILIPPIANS 1:6



GOD IS MATURING

US

Read Ephesians 4:1-16

In the Barta family, family pictures are a regular and important event. Each family picture originates in the mind of my wife. There in her mind a glorious vision of smiling faces and color coordinated dresses, bows and shirts is born. Once she reveals her will and lays out a game plan, we begin to pursue the maturity of her idea by pursuing a beautiful photo that all may admire. Living room worthy family photos do not happen instantly or easily.

When our family was a little younger, family photos proved especially difficult and required us to patiently work with one another. First, we had to all own the right colored clothing, and this usually required a trip or two to the store. Obtaining the clothes might have been difficult, but getting the 5-year-old, 3-year-old, and 6month-old dressed and ready presented a whole new challenge. The 6-month-old would need her diaper changed. The 3year-old would need to understand why she can't wear her tie-dyed t-shirt and the 5-year-old would tend to argue about her shoes. Once all seemed resolved, the 6month-old would spit up on her new dress. and my wife and I would wonder which one of us forgot to put a bib around the baby's neck. The difficulty only continues once we get in front of the camera. All three children

Ephesians 4:1-16

l urge you to walk...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love. EPHESIANS 4:1-2

look at the camera and smile wonderfully, just not at the same time. We encourage them kindly, then firmly and then with a bribe. Eventually our faces find their proper places at the proper time. The photo is captured, and glory is achieved.

According to Paul, God has a glorious purpose to save for himself a people who will one day reflect His glory fully as they commune together in perfect unity. This future for His church is certain but it has not yet been achieved. In the present, the church is going through a maturing process designed and directed by God. This process of maturing comes with great challenges and difficulties. God has graciously saved all kinds of men and women who have many differences. Each has his own needs, faults, weaknesses and imperfections. Just as in our pursuit of a family photo, some need more help, more time and more attention while others are less dependent. All of these differences and challenges threaten to splinter the church.

Understanding the threat, Paul reminded the church that despite their differences, all of them are bound together by something much greater. God has made them one body. They all have the same Father. Each share the same salvation. Each are alive by the same Spirit (Eph. 4:4- 6). God's glorious plan includes every one of His children united as one mature man. The glory of the church requires the inclusion and preparation of all who are His.

God is maturing us -

Week 5 Devotion 2

No matter how long you have been a believer you still have much maturing to do. As you participate in the growth of the church, God has shown, and must continue to show you much mercy and patience. Even as believers we sin, rebel, make mistakes and pursue idols. Thankfully God did not choose us because of who we were. Instead, He saved us and committed to transform us into glory. Rather than becoming fed up with us in our slow transformation, He patiently, mercifully and lovingly continues to mold and shape us.

How long have you been a believer?

In what areas of life has God most noticeably changed you?

In a similar way, those in the church can grow weary with each other. Knowing this, Paul commanded the church to "bear with one another in love" (Eph. 4:2). He called them to relate to one another in humility. He urged them to show the same patience and gentleness that God had shown them. If they fail to do so, the church will become a dismembered corpse. We must remember that God has bound us together as one, and He is maturing all of us until we obtain the glory of Jesus. He does not discard, leave out or write off any of His children no matter how blemished he/she remains. If He does not, neither should we.

List out three members of your small group, and next to their name write one spiritual weakness you have seen or have heard them confess.

In what area of life do you continue to stumble? If you cannot think of one, ask your spouse, children, parents or closest friend; they will know!

At many points in the process of taking a family photo, Jess and I always contemplate settling for less than the glorious vision she originally declared. A photo of the two of us would certainly save us much frustration, difficulty and money. We both could easily prepare ourselves without much trouble. As tempting as this option seems, it falls short of the glory of Jess' vision. The glorious family photo desired required that all of us be included and properly prepared. How can you actively help them grow in these areas?

As always, Paul connects right behavior with a right heart. The heart of God humbly, patiently mercifully and lovingly bears with us as we slowly grow in maturity. Only those who possess Gods character will also work with great faithfulness to bring all the church to glorious maturity. The proud will be impatient and unloving. They will make "church" about themselves, and they will leave behind the broken, sinful and messed up others while they forget that they themselves are also broken, sinful and messed up!

Week 5 Devotion 2

PRAISE AND THANKS

Praise God for His mercy, patience and steadfast love. Thank Him for patiently working on the area in which you most struggle. Thank Him for the evidence of His work in the area you have seen the most growth.

CONFESSION

Confess to God vour failure to actively work with humility and patience in the lives of others so that we all might grow into maturity. If God brings to mind any specific individuals you have "given up" on, confess your failure to show the mercy and patience God has shown you.

REQUESTS

Ask God to clothe you in humility, increase your love and lengthen your patience.

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

COLOSSIANS 1:28-29



SERMON NOTES

SERMON NOTES

CELL GROUP DISCUSSION PREP

CG is our disciplined effort to speak the truth one to another in hopes that the church may be brought to maturity.

> Learn More about Cell Group



GOD HAS BLESSED US

OPENING QUESTION

Who in your life would you say loves you the most? How have they convinced you of their love? How does their love and goodness toward you affect the way you respond/interact with them?

DISCUSSION PREP | WEEK 1

What does Paul say God deserves? (1:3)

Why does Paul say we should bless / praise God (1:3b)

Rather than calling people to worship God in hopes that God would act on their behalf, Paul called them to worship by declaring what God had already done for them.

According to Paul, in what ways has God blessed the believer? (1:4-14)

According to the text, why did God choose, redeem, and seal His people?

READ EPH. 1:1-14

REVIEW

What does Paul say God deserves? (1:3)

If you are a believer, you can be sure you have been chosen by God in love. You have been forgiven of all your sins, and you have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit. God has blessed you with all of these spiritual blessings.

DISCUSSION PREP WEEK 1

God Has Blessed His People

What evidences of the Holy Spirit do you see in your own life? List three specific and recent examples. (Devotion 2)

DISCUSS

The apostle Paul believed that knowing and understanding God's grace toward His people fuels their obedience and love for him.

What does Paul's declaration of God's grace in Eph. 1:3-14 teach you about the love God has for His people? (Devotion 1) If you are like Paul, you share a desire to see God's people passionately praise Him and faithfully obey Him. Rather than trying to change their behavior through fear of punishment or offer of reward, we should teach them of the glorious grace God has displayed in the gospel. Paul's discipleship strategy included clear articulation of the gospel and humble dependence on God in prayer.

Can you think of three individuals you have a strong desire to see grow in their discipleship?

When is the last time you discussed the work of Christ – the gospel with them? How often do you ask God to give them eyes to see? How could you declare the gospel to them more frequently and more clearly? (Devotion 3)

How has your knowledge and understanding of God and the gospel grown since the day God saved you? How has this affected the way you feel towards Him? (See Devotion 3)

When God shows us our failure, He calls us to change. Pick one or more of the names you have mentioned above and make sure you pray for him/her each day this week. However, do not stop at praying. Go ahead and bring up Jesus and His work in a conversation this week. Share your commitment with one person in your group so they can encourage you.

PRAY TOGETHER

Praise God for His love, His grace and His steadfastness. Let us Thank Him for His forgiveness of our sins and for the evidence His spirit has produced in our lives.

Confess your failure to tell of His wonderful gospel. Confess your lack of faith in the power of His message. Let us confess our pride which keeps us from humbly asking God to give sight to those we love but who do not walk in the truth.

Finally, ask God to give us faith to trust His gospel message is the power to salvation. Ask God to give us boldness to share the gospel.

In Scripture, those who belong to God can know they are His because they see the fruit of the Spirit in their lives (See Devotion 2). Only those with the Spirit believe. Only those born of God love as Christ loves. When they see the evidence of the Spirit in their lives. they can be confident they are securely His.



DISCUSSION PREP | WEEK 2

What does it mean to "Follow the course of this world" and to "follow the prince of the power of the air"?

OPENING QUESTION

Share a time when someone saved you from a desperate situation. How did you get into the helpless situation? What would have happened if this person did not intervene? Those dead in their sins face what characteristic of God?

What characteristics of God do you see in Paul's description of salvation in verses 4-7? (Devotion 2)

With great mercy, love, power and authority, God saves His people from His wrath, their sin and Satan's darkness. *Why did God save His people? (Eph. 2:7)*

READ EPH. 2:1-10

REVIEW

Paul says that before God saved us, we were dead in our sins. How does Paul describe what it means to be dead in sin? (Devotion 1) God chose to rescue us so that He might display His glorious grace (Eph. 1:3-14). Therefore, He saves us by "grace through faith." What does Paul say is the reason God saves His people by grace and through faith?

Those who have been made alive live differently than they did when they were dead. What do you learn about the new life of the believer in verse 10? (Devotion 2).

DISCUSSION PREP WEEK 2

God Has Saved His People

Not only does God redirect our desires but He also grants us faith. Faith is not just entrusting to God our eternal destiny. It is daily walking according to His will by trusting His character even when His instruction contradicts our plans and wisdom.

DISCUSS

If you are a believer, you have been saved by God!!!

When you consider the way God rescued you from sin and darkness, which of these four characteristics – mercy, love, power and authority – stands out to you most clearly? Why? (See Devotion 2)

Even though God has made us alive, believers still wrestle with the desires for this world and the rule of darkness managed by Satan. What desires of your own heart most often rival your desire for God?

What two people or things receive most of your time, energy and resources?

When God made you alive, he freed you from the bondage of your desires for this world and redirected your desires toward himself. Those who are His have a desire for the glory of their Creator that conquers their desires for the pleasures of this world.

Have you experienced this redirection of your desires from creation toward God?

How do you know? (Devotion 1)

Most likely – even though they might be good things – these present the greatest challenge to your pursuing God as your greatest treasure and source of satisfaction.

PRAY TOGETHER

As we pray this week let us first praise God for the mercy, love, power and authority God has shown in saving us. Thank Him for *making us alive." Thank Him for the gracious gift of faith He has granted to us. Thank Him for freeing us from the dark domain of Satan and from the powerful desires of our flesh.

Second, confess to God the sins you have already confessed to each other.

Last, let us present to God these specific requests. 1) Ask God to make alive the lost people around us. Before you pray have each person share one name.

GOD HAS RECONCILED US

DISCUSSION PREP | WEEK 3

What are those saved by faith through grace unable to do? (Devotion 1)

OPENING QUESTION

Have you ever been upset or in conflict with someone over something stupid or silly?

Those who have been made alive live differently than they did when they were dead. What do you learn about the new life of the believer in verse 10? (Devotion 1).

What was it, why was it such a big deal, and how did it eventually get resolved?

According to 2:11-22, how does God bring peace to our human relationships? (See Devotion 2).

READ EPH. 2:8-22

REVIEW

How is one saved according to Paul? (Devotion 1)

Scripture teaches that man lives in hostility and division because of the competing and unsatisfied desires they have for the things of this world. (James 4:1-3)

How does the peace and unity we now have with God bring peace and unity to our human relationships? (See Devotion 2)

DISCUSSION PREP WEEK 3

God Has Saved His People

Write down three words that describe your relationship with God before He saved you and three words that describe your relationship with Him now.

DISCUSS

Not only does God redirect our desires but He also grants us faith. Faith is not just entrusting to God our eternal destiny. It is daily walking according to His will by trusting His character even when His instruction contradicts our plans and wisdom.

Would you say that you have saving faith?

Why or why not?

Inseparable from our passions, pride too drives wedges of division between us and others. Pride manifests itself often in frustration and negativity towards others.

What imperfections in others tend to leave you frustrated?

What characterizes the people you find the hardest to love?

Is there a professing believer toward whom you have negative feelings?

How has this faith changed your lifestyle for the good? (Devotion 1)

Do you need to take any steps towards reconciling?

PRAY TOGETHER

As we pray this week let us first praise God for making peace between us and Him. Let us thank Him for the blood of Jesus Christ which has satisfied His wrath for those who believe. Thank Him for replacing our hostility toward Him with a heart of love and affection.

Second, confess to God the hostility, ill-will and/or indifference, he has exposed through the questions above. Confess your pride and the negative effects it has on your human relationships.

Last, ask God to humble you and to remove from you all boasting in anything other than His grace. Ask Him to restore any relationships that do not know unity, especially in your relationships with other believers.

GOD HAS RECONCILED US

OPENING QUESTION

Have you ever experienced reconciliation in a relationship that was severely fractured or hostile? DISCUSSION PREP | WEEK 4

According to 3:1-13, Paul was called by God to pursue Gentiles with the gospel so they might become reconciled to God and the Jews as fellow citizens and members of the same body. Paul called his ministry the "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18).

What do we learn about Paul's ministry of reconciliation in 3:1-13? Consider what he did and what he experienced. (See Devotion 2)

How was reconciliation achieved? Did someone help you and the other person navigate the division? Was it a short or long process?

In 3:14-21, we see that Paul pursued reconciliation not only by actively getting involved and by preaching the gospel, but he also cried out to God in humble dependence.

As you look at Paul's prayer, what stands out to you? How would you describe His view of God? What did He ask for? Why did he ask for it? (See Devotion 1)

READ EPH. 3:1-3:21

REVIEW

In Scripture, we learn that the hostility and division we experience in our human relationships stem from our hostile and divided relationship with God. In the Gospel, we find the solution.

DISCUSSION PREP WEEK 4

God Has Reconciled His People

DISCUSS

If you are a believer, you have experienced and are continuing to experience God's reconciling work.

Have you been reconciled to God?

In your own words how has God corrected your relationship with Him? If you have been saved by God, you should not only be experiencing reconciliation, but you should also be pursuing reconciliation in your own relationships and in the relationships between other people.

Where do you see division? Consider your home? Church? Workplace? Community? World? (Devotion 1).

Do you avoid getting involved as a minister of reconciliation?

How should the gospel shape what you say and what you do?

How have you failed to strive toward reconciliation in the relationships you identified? (Devotion 2)

Whom has God used in your life to directly influence and grow your love for God and the church?

If we take Paul's prayer as a model for our own, how should your prayers be changed or improved? (Devotion 2)

What sets this person apart from others? (Devotion 1)

PRAY TOGETHER

Praise God for raising up ministers of reconciliation. Thank Him for sending those whom He used to reconcile you to Himself. Praise Him for His faithfulness, love and power. Thank Him for working to bring you into peaceful, unified and loving relationship with others.

Confess to God our failure to pursue reconciliation. Confess our unwillingness to get involved in the messy and broken world. Confess our failure to pursue reconciliation by bringing clarity to the truth.

Ask God to change our hearts towards the specific individuals identified earlier (the last question). Ask God to bring reconciliation. Ask Him to fill us with boldness to speak the truth and a heart willing to get involved for the sake of God glorifying reconciliation.

GOD IS MATURING US

DISCUSSION PREP | WEEK 5

What does it mean for the church to be mature? (Devotion 1)

OPENING QUESTION

If you could hurry up and achieve one thing without having to work for it over time, what would it be? Why? If we acknowledge we are in the process of maturing, we must also acknowledge that we remain imperfect. Only one day will the church be completely like Christ. In the meantime, we are transforming from "one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor. 3:18).

What does Paul remind the Ephesian church is true about each one of them? (Eph. 4:4-6) (Devotion 2)

Why do you think Paul felt the need to remind them of their unity in Christ? (See Devotion 2)

READ EPH. 4:1-16

How does Paul instruct the believers to deal with one another as they mature together? (Eph. 4:1-3)

REVIEW

The apostle Paul speaks of the church as in the process of being built up or growing.

What does Paul say is the end of our growing? (Eph. 4:11-14) (See Devotion 1) How does remembering that we are one in Christ help us relate to one another with humility, gentleness, patience and love as we bear with one another?

DISCUSSION PREP WEEK 5

God Has Reconciled His People

While we can expect to see areas of growth in a church growing in maturity, we can also expect to see areas in which repentance and change need to take place.

What failures or weaknesses do you see in your church?

DISCUSS

If God is maturing the church, we can expect that your church looks more like Christ today than it did when you first started attending.

Since you joined your church, how has it grown, and in what ways does your church better reflect the character of Christ? (Devotion 1)

What failures or weaknesses do you see in your small group?

What could you and/or your small group do to actively help the church grow in the areas you identified? (Devotion 1)

In what areas of life has God most noticeably changed you, and in what area of life do you continue to stumble? (Devotion 2)

Consider even more closely your small group.

In what ways have you collectively grown closer to looking like Christ? (Devotion 1)

PRAY TOGETHER

Praise God for His mercy and patience as He bears with us in love as we slowly mature. Let us thank Him for not abandoning us when we continue to stumble in sin.

Let us confess to God our failure to repent and change. Let us confess our unwillingness to take responsibility for helping others grow.

Let us end by asking God to grant us repentance in the ways we do not reflect His character as we should. Ask God to give our leadership wisdom and discernment on what needs to be corrected and ask God to give our leadership boldness and strength to lead us through change and repentance.

