

Ephesians Reading Guide

If you had the opportunity to offer words of encouragement and challenge, a divestment of wisdom, to a group friends and family, what would you say? More to the point, if you could take by the hand your brothers and sisters in Christ and show them what it means to grow as a Christ follower, how would you do so? Perhaps you would remind them of the very foundations of their identity in Christ, pointing them toward their indissoluble hope in Christ and the grace that is theirs because the God of the universe set his love upon them before they took their very first breath. Perhaps you would invite them to remember that a part of their new, resurrection life in Christ is to be inextricably bound to other believers, living with humble selflessness that reflects the very heart of Jesus. Perhaps you would exhort them to realize that this new resurrection life will produce in them holiness and love and an existence that speaks of their place as citizens of the *now and one day* Kingdom of God. Perhaps you would extol them to filter all of their relationships through the lens of their own gospel transformation. Perhaps you would warn them of the fact that their allegiance to Christ brings real, spiritual opposition, and preparation for battle looks like a maturing faith and an ever-growing intimacy with the Lord.

The Apostle Paul spent nearly three years investing in the Church at Ephesus, and his letter to the group of churches in and around the city is filled with these exhortations, challenges, reminders, and more. In what is his most general letter to any church, Paul offers a robust exposition of the resurrection life that is now to be the lived experience of these Christian men and women.

Despite the general nature of the letter, Paul isn't writing into a cultural vacuum. These are believers who daily feel the tension of living new lives in Christ in the midst of real opposition in the form of false gods, lustful hedonism, idolatrous worship of the state, and the various and sundry everyday challenges of living in one of the largest and most influential metropolitan centers of the entire Mediterranean world. And when we think of Paul's letter to the Ephesians in those terms, it's easy to see a resemblance with our world today. We would do well to humbly sit under the wisdom offered in these six chapters, ingesting each encouragement and challenge and reminder in turn, and live together as a people whose identity is defined by our union with the resurrected Christ.

Ephesians is not a command to white knuckle our way into a new kind of behavior. It isn't some campfire singalong call to a cheap sense of camaraderie. It's an invitation to believe that God's redemptive work in our lives changes us completely, it binds us together, and it produces a new existence in us that speaks of hope and joy and humility and love that resemble the life of our Savior. Ephesians is a call to believe God when he says that we are new in Christ and, from that believing, live differently, ever in step with the Spirit. And this resurrection life touches everything about us.

May we be enthralled with the mystery of the gospel. May we see the glorious vision of a gospel-transformed community of faith living with Christ-exalting, others-serving humility. May we be a resurrection people in a dying world.

Ephesians 2:1-10

Overview

Amazing grace. If you do a generic Google search for those two words, the first two pages of results will show a version of the John Newton hymn by Celtic Woman, a perfume of the same name, and the title of the movie documenting the life of William Wilberforce. And much like a word that seems to lose its meaning when repeated over and over again, we can easily become anesthetized to the powerful significance of *grace* and its prominence in Scripture. And it is central in Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

This passage in Ephesians is amongst the most well-known of those found in the Pauline corpus, and for good reason. It begins with a painfully clear articulation of the sinful state of humanity prior to the regenerative work of Christ. Just as it seems as if Paul is about to go full Old Testament prophet and declare God's impending wrath upon the Ephesians, he utters two beautiful words...*But God*. While we should have been condemned and rejected, we have been embraced and restored, granted the resurrection life of Christ. Over and over again Paul reiterates that we are not responsible for somehow producing our salvation. Instead, we rejoice because it was due to the gracious initiative of God that we are redeemed from our former bondage to sin and established with a newfound purpose to live for God's glory. This is meant to engender humility and hope in the believer.

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I think Paul would have sung that hymn alongside us with joy and gratitude for the faithful love and kindness of our gracious God.

1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:1-10

Supplemental Passages

Exodus 34:1-9

Paul stresses that it is according to the grace of God that the Ephesians — and all believers — have been saved, and in so doing he points toward the nature of God. God is rich in mercy, he is loving, he is kind, and he is just. We see similar descriptions in God's revelatory statement of *who he is* to Moses prior to giving the commandments on the remade tablets of stone. This God who speaks to Moses is the God about whom Paul is speaking, as well, and he is the same God still today.

2 Corinthians 5

God's grace is transformative and it produces a commissioning by which we are called to the good work God has prepared for us to do. Paul, writing to the Church in Corinth, spoke to them of the ministry of reconciliation of which they are ambassadors as Christians, carrying forth the good news of God's redeeming, restorative love in Christ. God has redeemed us for a purpose. May we live with that grace-shaped intentionality as we invite others into relationship with our merciful, loving God through Christ.

Suggested Songs

"Saved My Soul" by CityAlight

"Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing" by Robert Robinson

"How Deep the Father's Love for Us" by Stuart Townend

"Only a Holy God" by CityAlight

Life Group Discussion Questions

- 1) What observations or questions stand out in Ephesians 2:1-10?
- 2) Paul begins this section with some pretty stark words about who the Ephesian believers were before they put their faith in Christ. His point isn't to create fear or despair in the Ephesians. Why might Paul begin here? How do these first three verses set the stage for what Paul says in 4-10?
- 3) How does Paul describe the nature and character of God in 2:4-7? Why do you think Paul finds it important to remind his audience that God has saved them by grace according to his unchanging nature?
- 4) Paul speaks of grace multiple times in this passage, which is a familiar term for many of us. What comes to mind when you hear the word, "grace?" How would you define it based on Paul's use of it in this passage?
- 5) How is verse 8 a comfort to you? How does this passage as a whole encourage humility amongst believers? How does it foster hope?
- 6) How might we define the "good works" Paul talks about in 2:10? How are you, individually and as a group, pursuing and participating in those good works?