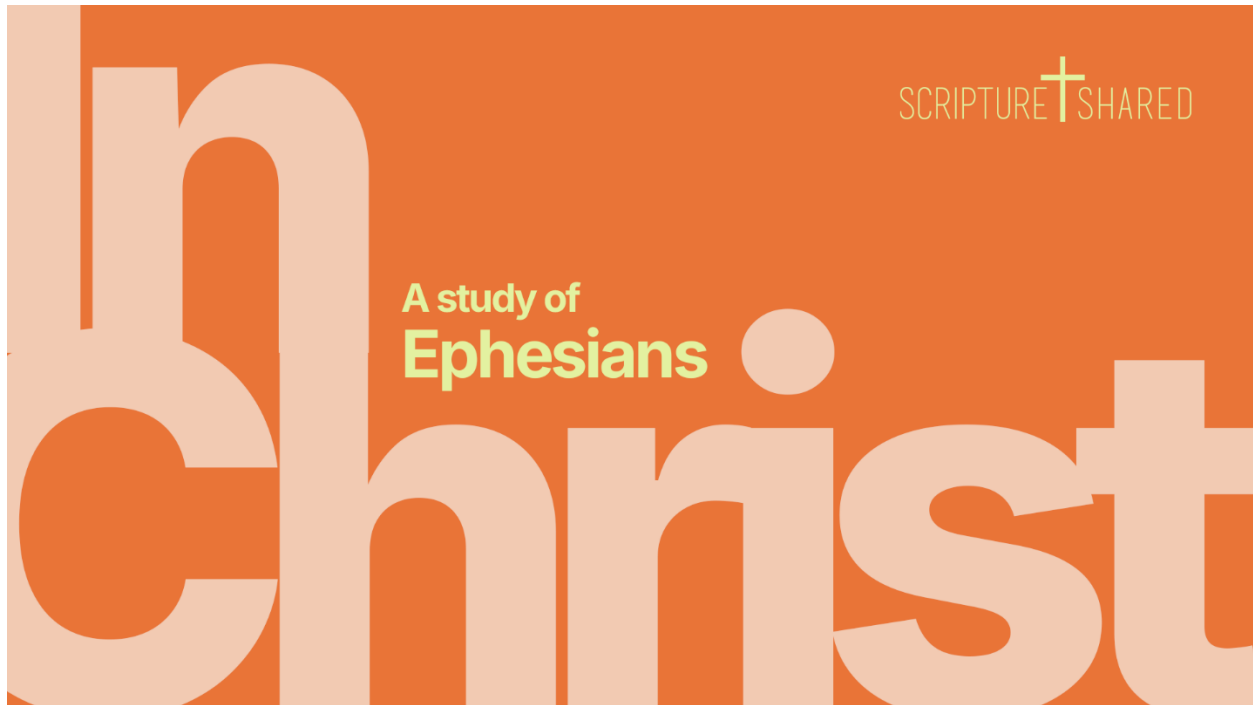




Week 3

Week 3, Day 1: Called to Share the Good News

Ephesians 3:1-11

¹This is the reason that I, Paul, am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you gentiles, ²for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you ³and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, ⁴a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. ⁵In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: ⁶that is, the gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

⁷Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. ⁸Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ ⁹and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, ¹⁰so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord...

Understanding the Passage:

Paul begins by describing the work God has given him. He is in prison, yet he calls himself a servant of the gospel and speaks of his ministry as a gift of grace. The "mystery" he has been entrusted to share is concrete: Gentiles, once treated as outsiders, are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and share in God's promise in Christ. Paul's calling is making room for people who were told they did not belong.

I sometimes hear the word calling and imagine I'm supposed to have a perfectly clear plan and purpose for my life. My own path into pastoral ministry has been much less tidy than that. I spent decades in another career, often running from what I sensed God had for me. I've come to learn that my calling becomes more clear when I pay attention to the people God places before me and the grace I have been given to offer them.

Paul describes his particular ministry, but the question of calling reaches far beyond pastors. Whether you are a teacher, a parent, a student, a caregiver, retired, or unsure what comes next, there are countless ways to help someone experience the welcome and love of Christ. Too often I think about what impressive thing God wants me to do. But, when I consider the grace and experiences God has given me and consider 'who might I be called to serve,' I often find I am exactly where I need to be and can trust God to show me the next right step.

Our callings may differ, but all of us have a part in making God's love visible.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Who has helped you feel that you belong to God's family?
2. Where have you seen someone treated as an outsider, and what might welcome and love look like there?
3. What gifts or experiences might God be inviting you to use in service to others?
4. How does it change your sense of calling to know that we all share this work as a church?

Week 3, Day 2: Welcome into God's Presence

Ephesians 3:12

¹² ...in whom we have access in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

Understanding the Passage:

After speaking of God's plan, Paul makes a poignant personal claim: in Christ we have access to God with boldness and confidence. This is not something reserved for people with the right background, a perfect record, or the right words to say. The same good news that brings Gentiles into God's family also gives *us* a place before God.

I meet people in pastoral care who worry that they have to get themselves together before they can pray or have a seat at Christ's table. Sometimes I recognize that hesitation in myself. When life feels messy, it is easy to think we should wait until we are calmer, more faithful, or more certain of what we believe. But Paul does not say our access depends on any of those things. It comes through Christ.

Being bold does not eliminate fear. We can come to God with grief, gratitude, doubt, anger, or a prayer we can barely put into words. Confidence is trusting we will be received. Christ has already made room for us, and we do not have to 'earn' our way in.

So, I try to speak plainly to God about the things on my heart. It doesn't need to be a polished prayer. It can begin with, 'God, here is what is going on.' Then be silent and listen for what God may have in response.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What makes it difficult for you to approach God honestly at times?
2. How is confidence in Christ different from confidence in your own faithfulness?
3. What is one thing you could bring to God today without editing it first?

Week 3, Day 3: When the Road Gets Hard

Ephesians 3:13

¹³ I pray, therefore, that you may not lose heart over my sufferings for you; they are your glory.

Understanding the Passage:

Paul asks the Ephesians not to lose heart because of his suffering in prison. While his imprisonment is real, he's not asking them to pretend pain is a blessing and everything is okay. He is asking them to see that the work of God has not ended because his life has taken a painful turn.

Sometimes, when we, or those we love, are in crisis, we can look at a setback and conclude the story is over. There may not be an explanation for what has happened, and we do not have to manufacture one. But we can remember, with boldness and confidence that whatever setback is upon us, it is NOT the end of the story.

Paul's hope is rooted in the larger story he just told the Ephesians. They were once a people kept at a distance and now are fellow heirs in Christ. Even from prison, Paul is still bearing witness to that grace. His suffering does not undo the welcome God has introduced.

If you are facing something difficult today, you do not need to find a hidden purpose in your pain. You can name it honestly and ask for help. Thankfully, our church community can help us hold onto that hope when we cannot hold it by ourselves.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Are there any setbacks that may be making it difficult for you to see beyond your present circumstances?
2. Whose faithfulness has helped you keep going during a difficult season?
3. How can a community offer hope without minimizing someone's suffering?

Week 3, Day 4: Rooted and Grounded in Love

Ephesians 3:14-19

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. ¹⁶ I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit ¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. ¹⁸ I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Understanding the Passage:

After speaking about calling, access to God, and suffering, Paul pauses to pray for the church. He asks God to strengthen them through the Spirit and to make Christ at home in their hearts. He wants them to be "rooted and grounded in love."

Sometimes, I can be too quick to ask God for direction. I want God to immediately show me what to do next or to help me make the right decision. Paul's prayer reminds me I often forget that before I can serve well or endure well, I need to receive the love that sustains me.

He also prays that we might comprehend the breadth, length, height, and depth of Christ's love "with all the saints." We learn this love together. Another person's welcome, patience, prayer, or steady presence can help us recognize the grace of God we may struggle to receive on our own.

Perhaps the most faithful thing we can do is stop and receive the love of Christ, the love that surpasses knowledge.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What helps you experience God's love, rather than only think about it?
2. Where do you think you most need the strength Paul asks God to give?
3. How has someone in the church helped you see the breadth of Christ's love?
4. What would change if you trusted that you are loved before you accomplish anything?

Week 3, Day 5: More Than We Can Imagine

Ephesians 3:20-21

²⁰ Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Understanding the Passage:

Paul finishes with praise. God is able to accomplish so much more than we can ask or imagine through the power at work within us. These words don't just encourage us to dream bigger. Paul has described a divided people becoming one family, ordinary believers being strengthened by the Spirit, and a church learning to live in a love beyond its ability to measure. Oh, how much we need this in our world these days!

These are larger hopes than we can bring about on our own. When I see the division in our nation and I look at the needs people carry into church, I sometimes wonder whether what we can offer will be enough. Thankfully, Paul's words of praise remind us that God's power is already at work among us.

"Far more" comes in ways we do not predict: a relationship repaired across a long-standing divide, courage to remain present in a seemingly impossible season, someone coming to believe they belong, or a community able to be more generous than it thought possible. So often, we only see a small part of what God is doing.

As we close this week, think back over the chapter. Where might God be inviting you to serve? What have you been afraid to bring to God? Where do you need hope or stronger roots in love? Bring those things to God, even if your prayer feels too small. The power at work in us is God's, and to God be the glory.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What have you heard in this chapter that you most need to remember?
2. Where might God be at work in a way you would not have expected?
3. What prayer feels too large, or too small, to bring to God right now?
4. How could we, as a church, make God's generous love more visible?

Video Discussion Questions:

1. Paul says his calling was to share the good news that Gentiles belong fully in God's family. Who may still wonder whether there is room for them in the church? What might a meaningful welcome look like?
2. In the video, the pastors describe their sense of purpose in ministry. How has your understanding of your own purpose changed over time?
3. What gifts or experiences come to mind for you that may serve God?
4. Paul says we can approach God with boldness and confidence through Christ. What tends to make that difficult in our ordinary lives?
5. Paul asks the church not to lose heart over his sufferings. What helps us hold onto hope when someone we care about faces a setback?
6. The video uses the imagery of deep roots and a strong foundation. What practices or relationships may help you remain rooted in Christ's love?
7. What is the difference between knowing that God loves you and actually living as someone who trusts that love?
8. When you hear that God can do more than we ask or imagine, what possibilities come to mind for our community?

Prayer requests and other notes: