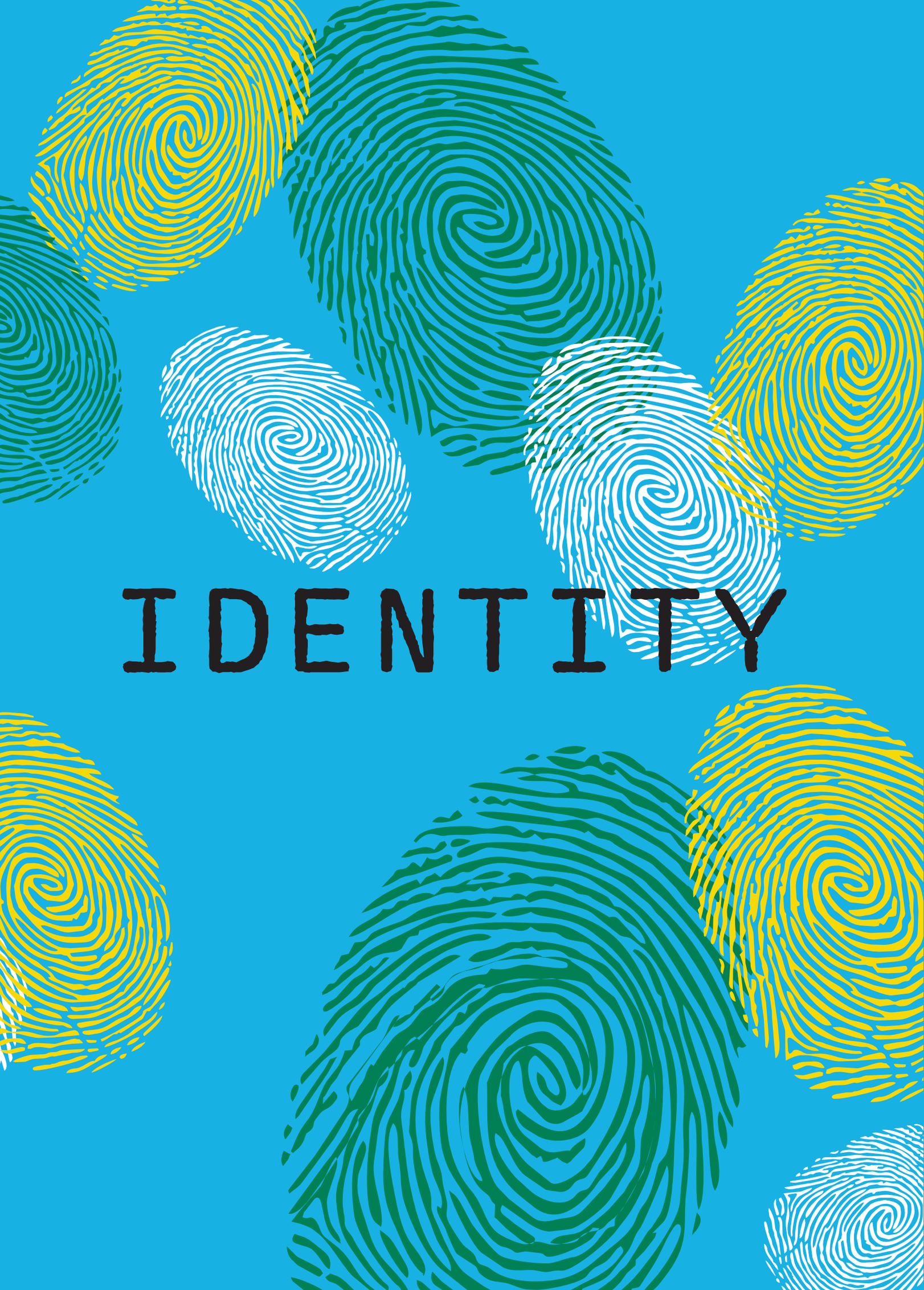

IDENTITY

EPHESIANS 1 (NIV)

[1] Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,
To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:
[2] Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
[3] Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. [4] For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love [5] he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus
Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— [6] to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. [7] In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace [8] that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, [9] he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, [10] to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.
[11] In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, [12] in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. [13] And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, [14] who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.
[15] For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, [16] I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.
[17] I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. [18] I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, [19] and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength [20] he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, [21] far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. [22] And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, [23] which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

MY IDENTITY CREED

I am a child of God
I am made in the image of God
I am blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ
I was chosen by Him before the world began
I am loved more than I will ever know

My Father knows me
My Father cares for me
He takes great delight in me
I have been redeemed
I have been set free
I have been forgiven

I am a saint
I am loved in the Beloved
I am designed and destined for great purposes in Him
I am sealed with the Holy Spirit
I am God's holy temple
I am intended to live for His glory

Christ dwells in me
I am a new creation
I am a child of the Light
I am part of a new family

I am precious
I am called
I am empowered
I am God's inheritance
I am a co-heir with Christ
I have the mind of Christ
I am dead to sin
I am alive to Christ
I am seated with Him in heavenly places
I am a child of God

WEEKLY STUDY

SUNDAY NOTES

_____ / _____ / _____

WHY & WHAT DO I NEED TO CHANGE?

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the _____ _____ has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)

This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a _____ _____. The old life is gone; a _____ _____ has begun!
2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLT)

God created me. He gave me _____ life.

When I put my faith in Christ, He gives me _____ life.

When we are made new by God, we are immediately: loved, forgiven, accepted, adopted, chosen, blessed (with every spiritual blessing), the Father's delight, redeemed, spiritually rich, included, saved, secure, reconciled to God, an heir, God's possession and many more.

PROBLEM: Although I _____ a new creation, I don't always _____ _____ or _____ _____ a new creation.

SOLUTION: I need to understand _____ I am in Christ and then learn _____ to live in the full truth of that identity.

Identities:

1. I am a _____ /_____
2. I am a _____
3. I am a _____
4. I am a _____
5. I am an _____

Do not _____ to the pattern of this world, but be _____ by the renewing of your mind. Romans 12:2

How do I identify areas that need transformation?

1. Ask God to _____ them out

This requires a commitment to _____ and _____.

2. Areas of constant _____

3. Our _____

Every _____ shall be raised up, every _____ and hill made low; the rough ground shall become _____ … Isaiah 40:4

4. Poor _____

How do I change?

… be transformed by the _____ of your _____. Romans 12:2

We need _____ _____with our Maker.

- You were chosen before the world began
- You are loved more than you will ever know
- You have been forgiven of everything you have ever done wrong
- You are completely accepted by the One Who made you
- You have been adopted into a Royal family
- You have been blessed beyond belief (with every spiritual blessing in Christ)
- Your heavenly Father takes great delight in you

SUNDAY NOTES

_____ / _____ / _____

HOW CAN I GROW IN MY RELATIONSHIP WITH MY FATHER?

Reminder:

- You were chosen before the world began
- You are loved more than you will ever know
- You have been forgiven of every thing you have ever done wrong
- You are completely accepted by the One Who made You
- You have been adopted into a Royal family
- You have been blessed beyond belief (with every spiritual blessing in Christ)
- Your heavenly Father takes great delight in you

I am His child

Grace and peace to you from God our _____ .... Ephesians 1:2
Praise be to the God and _____ of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Ephesians 1:3

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious _____, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may _____ Him *_____. Ephesians 1:17*

Our heavenly Father is:
All-_____ (Revelation 19:6)
_____ of the world (1 Timothy 1:17)
_____ (Matthew 5:48)
_____ (Psalm 100:5)
_____ (1 John 4:8)

And He is also _____ Father.
And He wants me to know Him better.

My relationship with my _____ _____ is the single most _____ relationship of my life.

Every ounce of security, acceptance, strength and love that I need I can find in Him.

"You'll never know that He is all you need until He is all You have"

How do I get to know my Father better?

1. **Spend _____ with Him _____ if possible**

..he [Jesus] went up on a mountainside by himself _____ _____. Later that night, he was there _____ ... Matthew 14:23

2. Read His written _____

[Your words] are more _____ than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. Psalm 19:10

3. _____ to Him

'"_____ _____ in heaven, hallowed be your name, [10] your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Matthew 6:9,10

4. _____ to His voice

... that you may love the Lord your God, _____ to his voice, and hold fast to him. Deuteronomy 30:20

5. _____ with His family

They devoted themselves ... to fellowship Acts 2:42

SUNDAY NOTES

_____ / _____ / _____

HOW CAN I SERVE GOD MORE EFFECTIVELY

1. I am His _____. He is my Father.

2. I am His _____. He is my Master.

In most cultures there is a huge difference between these two 'identities', but in God's kingdom they are like sides of the same coin:
I am His _____ who serves, AND
I am _____ _____ who has been adopted as His child.

"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. [15] To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. [16] The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. [17] So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. [18] But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.
[19] "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. [20] The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.'
[21] "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' Matthew 25:14-21

(One bag of gold was the equivalent of **20 years'** wages.)

How do we serve the Master most effectively?

1. **Know what _____ _____ is like:**
a. He _____ it all
b. He _____ His servants
c. He will _____

2. Know what _____ Him – _____ and _____ service.

"put his money to work" – is a _____ to describe the actions of the good & faithful servant over a long period of time. It is not about money. It is about the faithfulness of the servant.

There are many different ways of serving the Master, but all of them require _____.

Jesus replied, 'Anyone who loves me will _____ my teaching. John 14:23

3. Remember the Master's incredible _____
"His master replied, '_____ _____, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of _____ _____. Come and share your master's _____!' Matthew 25:14-21

"Always give yourselves _____ to the work of the Lord, because you know that your _____ in the Lord is not in vain." 1 Corinthians 15:58

SUNDAY NOTES

_____ / _____ / _____

HOW DO I DEAL WITH MY MISTAKES?

1. I am His _____. He is my Father.
2. I am His _____. He is my Master.
3. I am a _____. He is my Saviour.

To the _____ who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus Ephesians 1:1 (ESV)

To God's holy people in Ephesus … Ephesians 1:1 (NIV)

To all the _____ in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi… Philippians 1:1 (ESV)

We need to understand our _____ in Christ and that will transform our _____ in Christ.

Christ has _____ me and made me holy. He is busy _____ me and making me holy.

When it comes to dealing with our sinful mistakes we can either make:

← →

_____ _____ of them OR _____ _____of them

Signs of making too little of them:

- I defend sinful mistakes behind a multitude of _____ and arguments including: I'm only human, God's grace means I can do whatever I want, I don't really care what the Bible says – I choose my own way.
- I get _____ whenever someone else points out something that I did wrong. I don't readily admit to any mistakes. Either I seldom apologise to others or I simply apologise to be rid of the other person.
- I have a deep down belief: "God is quite _____ to have me following Him."

Signs of making too much of them:

- I live with an unshakable sense of _____ that simply won't go away. It haunts and taunts me and wants me to believe there's simply no way God could look with love and approval on me.
- I feel like I've pushed God into a corner with my repeated failures, and I have come to a place of _____, or of self-contempt.
- I feel God is upset with me — He just _____ me; merely puts up with me.

So how should I deal with sinful mistakes?

1. Regularly reflect on Christ's radical _____

2. Ask God to shine His light on areas that _____ Him

God is _____ … 1 John 1:5

Live as children of light … [10] and find out what _____ the Lord. Ephesians 5:8,9

3. _____ my sin

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and _____ _____us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

4. Walk _____

Therefore, there is now no _____ for those who are in Christ Jesus .. Romans 8:1

"God buries our sins in the depths of the sea and then puts up a sign that reads, '_____ _____'."
Corrie Ten Boom

SUNDAY NOTES

HOW DO I PREPARE MY LIFE FOR ETERNITY?

1. I am His _____. He is my Father.
2. I am His _____. He is my Master.
3. I am a _____. He is my Saviour.
4. I am a _____ of heaven. He is my King.

...you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow _____ with God's people and also members of his household. Ephesians 2:19
But our citizenship is in _____. Philippians 3:18-20

[24] By faith Moses, ... chose to be ill-treated along with the people of God _____ _____ to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. [26] He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of _____ value _____ the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. [27] By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. Hebrews 11:24-27

As a citizen of heaven:

1. **My love for Christ should displace the fleeting pleasures of _____**

Moses, ... chose to be ill-treated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of _____. (Hebrews 11:25)

[18] For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. [19] Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on _____ _____. [20] But our citizenship is in _____. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ ...
Philippians 3:18-20

2. **My love for Christ should overtake my desire for worldly _____ and achievements**

He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the _____ of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. Hebrews 11:26

'You will not be in heaven two seconds before you cry out, "Why did I place so much importance on things that were so temporary? What was I thinking? Why did I waste so much time, energy, and concern on what wasn't going to last?"' (Rick Warren)

3. **My love for Christ should satisfy my craving for human _____ (v27)**

[27] By faith he left Egypt, _____ _____ the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. Hebrews 11:27

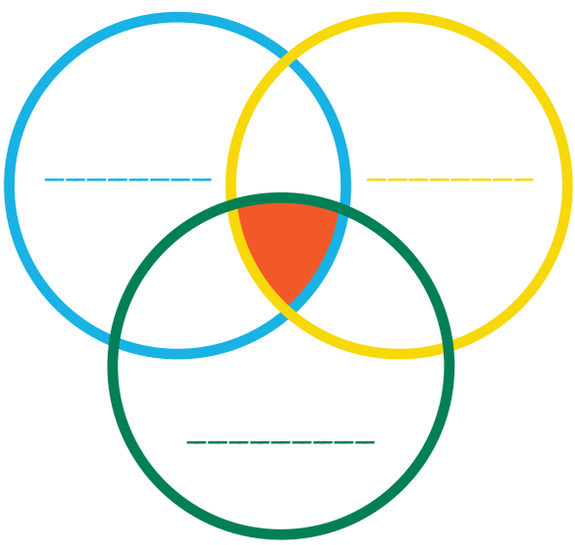
Am I now trying to win the _____ of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ. Galatians 1:10

As a citizen of heaven my status is secure: I am already _____, _____, and my King is _____ with me.

SUNDAY NOTES

HOW DO I LIVE A LIFE OF MISSION & PURPOSE?

1. I am His _____. He is my Father.
2. I am His _____. He is my Master.
3. I am a _____. He is my Saviour.
4. I am a _____ of heaven. He is my King.
5. I am an _____. Christ commissions me.



As I understand my _____ in Christ, I can more fully live out my _____ for Christ with all of the unique _____ given by Christ.

We are therefore Christ's _____, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God. 2 Corinthians 5:20

I am an ambassador of _____ _____. He has graciously _____ me and divinely _____ me.

For _____ chose _____ in him before the creation of the world Ephesians 1:4

As His ambassador I have been called to live a life of _____ and _____.

1. **I am commissioned to represent Christ in all that I _____ and _____.**

Follow my _____, as I follow the example of Christ. 1 Corinthians 11:1

2. **I am commissioned to be _____ with the things that _____ Him**

When he saw the crowds, he had _____ on them … Matthew 9:36

Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have _____ for these people … Matthew 15:32

Jesus had _____ on them and touched their eyes. Matthew 20:34

3. **I am commissioned to go _____ He sends me**

The Great Commission:
[18] Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Therefore _____ and make disciples of _____ _____, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20

The Fellowship of the Unashamed

"I am part of the fellowship of the unashamed.
I have Holy Spirit power.
The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line.
The decision has been made. I am a disciple of His.
I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away
or be still.

My past is redeemed. My present makes sense.
My future is secure. I'm finished with low living,
sight walking, small planning, smooth knees,
colourless dreams, tamed visions, worldly talking, cheap giving,
and dwarfed goals.

I no longer need pre-eminence, prosperity, position,
promotions, applause, or popularity. I don't have to
be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded
or rewarded. I now live by faith, lean on His presence,
walk by patience, am uplifted by prayer and labour by power.

My pace is set. My gait is fast. My goal is heaven.
My road is narrow. My way rough. My companions few.
My Guide is reliable and my mission is clear.

I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured,
lured away, turned back, deluded or delayed. I will not flinch
in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of
the adversary, negotiate at the table of the enemy,
pander at the pool of popularity or meander in the
maze of mediocrity.

I won't give up, shut up, let up, until I've stayed up,
stored up, prayed up, paid up, preached up for
the cause of Christ.

I am a disciple of Jesus. I must go till He comes, give 'til
I drop, preach till all know, and work till He stops me.
And when He comes for His own, He'll have no problem
recognizing me. My banner will be clear."

WEEK
ONE

I AM AN IMAGE-BEARER

Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26–27)

In 2012 Lance Armstrong experienced the worst crash of his life. Not a physical crash, but an identity crash. The International Cycling Union stripped him of his seven Tour de France titles. Following the revelations of his doping, his name, once associated with triumph over adversity, now lies in the dirt.
You may not have any prestigious awards to your name, but if all the ways you measure your value disappeared in an instant —be it pedigree, popularity, health, wealth, spouse, children, beauty, girlfriend, social media likes and friends, résumé, trophies and awards, car, or career—would there be any "you" left?

How fragile our earthly identities can be! Our secondary identities—a man, a woman, a parent, a child, a sibling, a lawyer, our nationality and ethnicity, an elite in whatever field—are only that. They are secondary, not the truest or deepest parts of who we are.

How wonderful, then, to discover that our real identity is not vulnerable at all. Who we really are is not earned, nor is it based on circumstances—rather the God who made us, and the Saviour who rescued us, bestows it upon us.

You hold in your hand a mirror that answers the pivotal question, who am I in Christ? In this devotional study, we will find many answers in the first chapter of the apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesian church. But before we turn there, realise that Paul's letter fits into a bigger story—the Bible—about Who God really is, and about who we really are. Look at the whole biblical story for insights into your identity, and you will find three major sections:

Section 1: First creation—our original glorious identity.
Section 2: Fall within creation—our damaged identity.
Section 3: New creation in Christ—our renewed glorious identity.

This study focuses on Section 3: who I am in Christ. But in today's message and the next two, let's consider Section 1: who I am in God's image.

Don't miss the connection between Sections 1 and 3. When Paul says, "You are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus" or tells us to "put on the new self, created to be like God" (Ephesians 2:10; 4:24), he implies that the new creation—the new self in Christ—is a restoration of humanity's original creation.

Read through the six days of Genesis 1 and you will notice creation building and swelling toward a climax. Creation starts out "formless and empty"—like uncut stone, a mass of clay, a rough sketch. But then it takes shape. There's light and dark. Heavens and earth. Land and sea. Sweeping movements on a grand scale. Then comes life, colour and finer lines—coral reefs and flowered fields. Then the animal kingdom—horses, grasshoppers, and blue whales.

As we read on, life erupts in its vast array, all the while building to an astonishing crescendo. On the sixth day, humans arrive. Only now do we meet a creature made in God's image. Now creation is not just "good" (as in the earlier days) but "very good."

What does it mean to be an image-bearer? **It means we are royalty.** In our world, there are haves and have nots. Some are the cream of the crop —compared to them, most everyone else are nobodies. But wait! That can't be right, because in Genesis 1, the term "image" means that all of humanity is royal, created to rule. In the ancient Near East, "image of God" was a throne name for kings—the special representatives of the gods. Put your shoulders back. There's something in all of humanity—you included—that is royal in God's eyes.

I AM AN IMAGE-BEARER, PART 2

When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers— the moon and the stars you have set in place— what are mortals that you should think of us, mere humans that you should care for us? For you made us only a little lower than God, and you crowned us with glory and honour. (Psalm 8:3–5)

John of Kronstadt was a nineteenth-century Russian Orthodox priest at the time when alcohol abuse was rampant. None of the priests ventured out of their churches to help the people. They waited for the people to come to them. John, compelled by love, went out into the streets. He would lift the hungover, foul-smelling people from the gutter, cradle them in his arms, and say to them, "This is beneath your dignity. You were meant to house the fullness of God."

You may have heard about original sin. But have you heard about your original glory? As a human you are crowned with glory and honour. You are a living representation of a Living God. Previously, we learnt that to be in God's image is to be royalty. What else?

To be in God's image means dignity. There's much talk nowadays about the inherent value of every life and of "human rights for all." It's why we tell our children not to act like beasts, and we are appalled when humans are treated like animals.

But where does the idea that we have inborn value originate from? Answer: it stems from the spread and influence of Scripture's teaching about humanity. The first chapter in the Good Book caused Christians to rescue and adopt abandoned infants (in the first century already) and, more recently, to fight for the end of slavery. They came to discern that the life, helplessly crying in a field or chained to a post, was a living icon. Given enough time, most people have come to agree—all humans, no matter how civilised or able-bodied or attractive or not, have the same inbuilt worth.

To be in God's image means responsibility. In the atheistic worldview, people have no inherent purpose. Their only purpose or responsibility is the one they assume for themselves. But no! God said to the first humans to exercise rule, to bring the earth to full flourishing. We now think of "ruling" as tyrannical exploitation, but in Scripture, there is no difference between kingship and stewardship.

Therefore, look after creation – plants, animals and natural resources. Bring out its potential. And show concern for the weakest humans, too. Overcome the systemic exploitation or extreme poverty that is beneath their God-given dignity.

To be in God's image means community. Western society especially promotes hyper-individualism where the most important thing is to be true to yourself. But no! Genesis 1:26 says, "God created them; male and female he created them." God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so when He creates in His image, He builds us for relationship. We cannot thrive on our own.

Also, He made them "male and female." On Africa's savannahs, lions and lionesses roar together to show the pride's strength. Holistic communities require men and women who collaborate to bring God's rule and reflect God's image.

I AM AN IMAGE-BEARER, PART 3

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:8–9)

In Max Lucado's children's book, You Are Special, Punchinello is a wooden person in a village of wooden people who stick stars on the achievers and dots on the strugglers. Poor Punchinello has so many dots that people give him more dots for no reason at all. But then he meets Eli, the Wood–maker, his maker who affirms him, telling him to disregard the opinion of others. "I made you," he explains. "I don't make mistakes. And I want you to come spend time with me." As Punchinello hears these words, dots begin to fall off. The more time he spends with Eli, the more dots slide off him.

The point of the story? We only find our true self when we find our Maker. We cannot know who we are till we know Whose we are. So far, we've learnt that to be in God's image means royalty, dignity, responsibility and community. It means three more things.

To be in God's image means humility.
In our world, we're taught that we're the captain of our lives. New Age spirituality goes even further—"you are God." But wait! That can't be right … An image is not the same as the source that it images. Take the full moon. It's beautiful, but it merely reflects the sun's light.

We are creatures not gods, dependent on God for existence. Our lives, the breath in our lungs, this day, everything good, whether spiritual or material, is a gift from God. *"What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?" (1 Corinthians 4:7)*

To be in God's image means compatibility.
In Genesis 1, only humans are made in God's likeness, fit for face-to-face relationship with the Creator. God may be transcendent and infinite, and we have human limits, yet somehow, we are relationally compatible with God. Like Adam, Eve and Punchinello, we are made to find ourselves in our Maker.

This is why it doesn't work to find ourselves outside of God, Who is the true source of our identity, purpose, meaning and worth. It's no surprise then that in Genesis 3, the serpent strikes at this very thing when tempting our first parents. Analyse Genesis 3 and notice that to this day Satan's lies have not changed: "God wants to keep your eyes closed, and stop you from realizing your potential." "Independence from God and personal autonomy is the path to life." "Following the desires of your heart will lead to finding your true self." "Shutting your ears to God is the key to authentic living." "Becoming your own god will open your eyes to who you really are."

Our first parents fell for the lie—instead of facing God like a sunflower to the sun, they turned their back on Him and hid. But without the light of His face, the image in us begins to wear away. But despair not.

To be in God's image means redeemability.
Before it was restored, the Sistine Chapel was celebrated as a genius composition. But it was also widely believed that Michelangelo's colouration was mediocre—too dark and monochromatic. And yet when they rehabilitated those frescoes to their original state, everyone could see the beautiful, spring-like colours—pale pink, apple green, vivid yellow, and sky blue against a background of warm pearly grey!

Without God, the image has faded, and our glory is damaged. But it is not completely destroyed. It is still redeemable. Jesus, the perfect image of God, comes to re-imprint His face on our lives.

I AM BLESSED

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. (Ephesians 1:3)

We turn to Ephesians 1. In it Paul shows us our identity in Christ. We learn, first, that it is a blessed one—in fact, each and every aspect of it (we will explore them all) is a "spiritual blessing."

Does this mean that the circumstances of a believer's life will also be blessed? A bumper sticker says, "I am too anointed to be disappointed; too blessed to be stressed." But this is not true. We may face severe stress and disappointment—nonetheless we can rejoice that we are blessed.

Consider the biblical story of a young prince. His dad, Jonathan, was the firstborn son of a king. Eventually the throne would pass to his father then to him. As a child, and living in a palace, he enjoyed the best childcare in the land—a full-time nurse. But when he was five, both his grandfather and father died in battle. His nurse, fearing for his life, picked him up and fled, and by mistake dropped him, breaking his back and disabling him for life. His name changed from Meribaal to Mephibosheth, which means, "one who faces shame." Hidden in a small town, his existence was all but forgotten.

This broken boy stands for those of us who have been crippled by circumstances—perhaps shunned by a love interest, exiled from a family or tribe, fired from a job, left by a spouse, victimized by a criminal, or stripped of our savings. These events commonly fill us with a sense of shame, injustice or alienation. They may also damage our sense of self-worth or identity.

Jump forward fifteen years in Mephibosheth's story. In 2 Samuel 9, the new king David remembers he had once sworn to his father, Jonathan, that he would do all he can to bless him and his family. David enquires if there is any whom he "can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" (v1) Upon hearing about the young man, he summons him and says, "Don't be afraid, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather. You will always eat at my table." (v7)

Wow! All along, Mephibosheth has been blessed even though he felt cursed—blessed by a promise of grace, all because he is "in Jonathan." This is an analogy for those of us "in Christ." It does not matter what hardships have come upon us; what people have thought about us; or what we have concluded about ourselves. What counts is what God thinks about us.

As David did for the young prince, so God does for us once we place our faith "in Christ." **First, He gives you "the riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus"** (Ephesians 2:7). Life and society may not always be kind to us, but we can rejoice in God's generosity to us. We are the King's kids.

Second, you are forever welcome at His table. There's a place for us at the royal table. When circumstances overwhelm us, we can thank God: "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. … My cup overflows" (Psalm 23:5).

Third, you have an inheritance. Not literal but spiritual "property." In a sermon to the Ephesian pastors, Paul speaks of "the word of [God's] grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance" (Acts 20:32). Each of us has a crucial part to play in the people and in the mission of God!

How does Mephibosheth respond to David's invitation? He says, "What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?" (v8) Let us not follow his example of unbelief! God's word of grace outweighs the words spoken by circumstances, others and ourselves. Truly, we are "blessed … with every … blessing in Christ."

I AM CHOSEN

The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you. (Deuteronomy 7:6–8)

It feels good to be chosen for something special—a sports team, a promotion, a special task, an elite squad, to represent our school or country. It feels even better to be chosen by someone special—perhaps adoptive parents or the person we love.

Yet we may be familiar, too, with the deflating if not painful experience of not being chosen, or of being rejected.

Praise God, then, that in Christ, we are chosen. As Ephesians 1:4 says, *"For [our God and Father] chose us in Christ."* Again, in verse 11, it says, *"In him we were … chosen."* The privilege of being chosen by God eclipses every other time we were chosen by people. It can also heal our hearts of the times we have been rejected or overlooked.

The TV drama series The Chosen, reveals Jesus through the eyes of those who met Him, mainly those in His inner circle—Matthew, Peter, Nicodemus, Mary Magdalene. But why is the series called The Chosen? Is Jesus The Chosen? Or is it this motley crew who are The Chosen? The answer is yes—to both.

Jesus is the Chosen One. Centuries before His arrival, God said through a prophet, *"Here is my servant, whom I uphold,* **my chosen one** *in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him."* (Isaiah 42:1) This is the verse that our minds should remember as we read of Jesus, still dripping from His baptism, hearing heaven's words, "This is my Son … in whom I delight." In fact, Isaiah's words came to John the Baptist's mind after he had baptised Jesus in the Jordan river, *"I testify that this is God's Chosen One."* (John 1:32–34)

I am chosen, too. Remarkably, then, when we are "in Christ" we also are chosen—both by Someone special and for something special. Says Jesus, *"You did not choose me, but I chose you … to bear fruit that will last forever."* (John 15:16)

Some parents accidentally bring kids into the world. Too often the message is: "We never planned or chose you. We landed up with you." But God never speaks such a word to us. Jesus does not reluctantly accept those who just happen to be in the vicinity. He chose us *"before the creation of the world"* (Ephesians 1:4). From before the beginning of all things, you were a part of God's plan and purpose—not an accident, not an afterthought.

Realising we are special in God's sight motivates us to try to make something special of our lives. A sense of being chosen helps us to withstand opposition, and to rise to greater contribution.

It's all grace, by the way. We are not chosen because we're special. We are special because we are chosen! Jesus is *"the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world."* (Revelation 13:8). Long before He came to live and die among us, He knew that our being chosen required His being rejected. What mercy and grace!

I AM A SAINT

To God's holy people ... [our God and Father] chose us in [Christ] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. (Ephesians 1:1, 4)

Notice that Paul's letter addresses *"God's holy people"* (Ephesians 1:1) The phrase "holy people" is normally translated as "saints." This is who we already are in Christ. But then verse 4 says, "he chose us in him ... to be holy and blameless in his sight." This is what we are to become as we follow Christ.

Holding these two verses side by side gets to the heart of the mystery of what is called a believer's "sanctification:" We are already holy; we must become more holy. We are already saints, now we must become more saintly. In short, Christian living boils down to the adventure of becoming who we already are.

You are a saint. The term confuses us because the saints of Catholicism come to mind. Following the trend in church history to call the apostles saints—St. Peter, St. Paul—later heroes of the faith were called saints, too—St. Francis of Assisi, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Patrick and so on. Even in Protestant churches we think of saints as exceptional believers who achieved a high level of godliness and bravery.

But actually, every believer is a saint, even the compromised or cowardly ones. Take the wicked and worldly Corinthian church, for example, whom Paul addresses as *"those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints."* (1 Corinthians 1:2).

The New Testament uses the Greek words *hagios, hagiasmos* and *hagiazo* to refer, respectively, to a person (a saint), an action (sanctify), and a noun (sanctification.) The core idea of the action is "to separate" or "to set apart." Set apart by whom? By God—we are God's special possession. Set apart for what? For the special privilege of reflecting God's character into the world.

We imagine that, first we're forgiven, by God's one-step saving act. Let's call that "day one" of our life with Christ. And then—so we think—our sanctification commences on "day two." But actually, part of our sanctification happens on "day one"!

What does it mean to be a saint? First, it means a transformed **status**. An analogy may help. When I buy a toothbrush, it becomes mine and is "set apart" for me. From then on, nobody but I may use it. Similarly, when I am saved, I am God's, set apart for Him alone.

Second, it means a transformed **state**. We are "saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth" (2 Thessalonians 2:13). When we embrace the Gospel, the Spirit changes our inner person, giving us a new heart with a new longing and capacity for holiness.

Our new position in Christ and our new disposition in the Spirit motivates and empowers us to become more like Christ i.e. more holy!

Only three passages in the New Testament seem to call believers "sinners" (though these references may be referring to unsaved people). However, in close on 20 places, believers are called saints! Evidently, God does not identify us with our sin. We are not sinners who sometimes get it right. We are saints who sometimes get it wrong. We are not "sinners" trying to become someone we by nature are not. We are saints trying to become by God's empowering grace who we already are by God's saving grace.

WEEK
TWO

I AM LOVED

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? … For we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35, 37–39)

The movie Blood Diamond depicts the world of "conflict diamonds" during Sierra Leone's 1999 civil war. At the end of it, in the middle of a corpse-filled battlefield, Danny Archer (Leonardo DiCaprio) is assisting Solomon Vandy (Djimon Hounsou) to dig at the alleged site of a buried diamond. The subplot of the movie is that Solomon has been searching for his boy, Dia, who was once kidnapped, brutalized, and forced to be a child soldier. As the two men dig, Dia comes upon them with a gun. The trained killer child has forgotten his dad and is about to kill them.

Solomon calmly speaks, "You are Dia Vandy. Of the proud Mende tribe. You are a good boy who loves soccer and school. Your mother loves you so much. She waits by the fire … with your sister and the new baby. The cows wait for you. And Babu, the wild dog … I know they made you do bad things, but you are not a bad boy. I am your father, who loves you. And you will come home with me and be my son again."

Love prevails over the amnesia in Dia. He has forgotten who he is and how he is loved—when he remembers, he melts into his father's arms.

One way the Bible puts the story of the human race is as a story of forgetting who we are. Our unfallen parents (Adam and Eve) lived not only in the physical sunrays of the sun, but also in the spiritual and emotional rays shining from God's love. They knew who they were—precious-to-God image-bearers. But then Satan's lie darkened their hearts like a shadow in the land: "You're not loved." They believed and were kidnapped by the lie. From there, they forgot who they were—and surrendered to darkness all the more. Just like us.

What can rescue us? Only the discovery that we are loved. In Ephesians 1, the next aspect of our identity in Christ is that "In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ" (v4–5). See those two words: "in love." God's love dramatically broke into history.

Jesus on earth showed us what God is like. His love for each of us was ultimately demonstrated on the cross (Romans 5:8) — apparently He would rather die than live without us, which is what He did. That kindness is magnified by the fact that we were His enemies. The Gospel is the only love story in which the hero dies for the villain.

God's love comes closer still. The Spirit pours it out into our hearts (Romans 5:5), enabling us to know how long and wide and deep and high is the love of Christ (Ephesians 3:18). Even when do not feel His love, we can affirm on the basis of the Gospel alone that we are kept in God's heart as His adopted children.

Imagine you are the rope in a tug-of-war, caught between all of creation and amnesia on the one side and the Creator's love on the other. Paul figuratively speaks about the full spectrum of creation pulling us away from God.

On the other side is God's all-powerful love. Painful experiences and the whispers of Satan may cause us to doubt or forget our identity and origin, yet God's love awakens us to who we are: "You are My child. … I am your Father, who loves you. And you will come home with Me."

I AM KNOWN

You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. … [Y]ou are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, you know it completely. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. … For you created my inmost being; … I am fearfully and wonderfully made. … Your eyes saw my unformed body. … How precious to me are your thoughts … [T]hey outnumber the grains of sand." (select verses in Psalm 139)

God knows us so well that He has known us from before we even lived a day. Psalm 139 says that God has known us since we were in the womb. Jeremiah the prophet took this idea further—God has known us since before we were conceived. Paul takes it to the next level in Ephesians 1: God has known us since before the world was born!

In one of C. S. Lewis's Narnia books, The Voyage Of The Dawn Treader, Eustace Scrubb wanders off to avoid doing his chores. He enters a dragon's cave, greedily plunders its treasures, and is turned into a dragon as a result. Aslan the lion comes to his rescue and "undragons" him. This deliverance transforms the difficult Eustace into "a different boy." Following the incident, Eustace asks his cousin Edmund, "Who is Aslan? Do you know him?" Edmund admits to knowing Aslan, but the beginning of his answer is surprising: "Well, he knows me." According to Edmund, being known by Aslan is more important than knowing Aslan.

One of the great existential questions is, "Who am I?" David asked it, for example, in 2 Samuel 7. Having just heard that instead of building a house (or temple) for God, God will build a house (or dynasty) for him, he comes undone, and prays: "Who am I, … Lord … that you have brought me this far? … [Y]ou have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant—and this decree, Sovereign Lord, is for a mere human!" Notice that the answer to "Who am I?" is revealed in David's next statement: "What more can David say to you? For you know your servant" (v18–20).

If you wonder who you really are, the answer is you are known by God. That's why David can write Psalm 139, quoted above, which can be summarized: "How marvellous it is that God knows us better than we know ourselves or anyone else can!"

There are two kinds of knowing in Psalm 139: there's facts and there's intimacy. The same Hebrew word for "Adam 'knew' *(yadah)* Eve" (Genesis 4:1) is used in, "You have searched me, Lord, and you 'know' *(yadah)* me." That is intimacy.

God knows all the details about David (and you)—as many as the sand grains. But He also knows David intimately and personally. Abraham is also known by God (Genesis 18:18–19). Moses, too—God talks to him face to face and says, "I know you by name" (Exodus 33:11–12). What a privilege that we also may be known by God.

J.I. Packer in Knowing God writes, "What matters supremely is not … the fact that I know God, but the larger fact which underlies it—the fact that He knows me. I am never out of His mind. All my knowledge of Him depends on His sustained initiative in knowing me. I know Him because He first knew me and continues to know me. … There is not a moment when His eye is off me, or His attention distracted from me, and no moment when His care falters."

I AM KNOWN, PART 2

Formerly, you did not know God. ... But now ... you know God—or rather are known by God. (Galatians 4:8–9)

Paul states here that in the Gospel, we come to know God, but then with the words "or rather," he offers a swift follow on. There is something even more foundational than knowing God — and that is being known by God.

In Ephesians 1, we learn how important it is to know God: "I keep asking that ... you may know Him better" (v17). The rest of Ephesians 1 is about discovering ourselves as God knows us. The Gospel, therefore, unveils two identities: God's identity and our own identity. We get to know God's identity as He shows Himself to us. We get to know our identity by discovering how God sees us.

But this true Gospel has a modern rival.
In society today, the search is on for the self of our own making.

For a few decades, Pixar, Disney, Marvel and other influential story-telling brands have preached a false gospel of self-identity: "Be true to yourself," "Find yourself," "Look inside your heart," "Be the hero." So effective has this messaging been that the cult of self-creation has impacted much of our thinking about our identity.

According to this false gospel, we must be unique, even indescribable. "Normal" is a no-go. To become remarkable, younger generations especially create a patchwork of unique piercings, pronouns, tattoos, and TikTok. We stitch together our own technicolour dream coat based on an eclectic mix of gender identities, various sub-cultures, social causes, or ethnic designations. Aided by social media, we can sustain the feeling that each of us is the centre of reality.

According to this false gospel, the creation of self-identity is strictly a solo project. What others say should be ignored or outright rejected. No one must interfere in this self-creation: not parents, not teachers, not social norms, not even God. Social norms are to be thrown out, often along with a career or college, faith or family. It doesn't matter what loving friends or family think they know about us. All that matters is who I choose to be and who I identify as.

How does the true Gospel challenge these false beliefs?

First, the Gospel shows that our true self is God-created, not self-created. In Out Of Africa, Isak Dinesen writes that discovering my true self is about "faith in the idea God had, when He made us." A person who has grasped this is empowered to become the best that God made them to be. Our main pursuit is not happiness or comfort. It is God. And when we pursue Him, we become the person that He designed us to be.

Second, the Gospel frees us from dependency on human approval. Before Paul came to know Christ, he spent all his energy building a life of outward success that others would approve of. Once he came to know Christ, his whole outlook changed: "Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ." (Galatians 1:10). He discovered that the only approval that matters is from the One Who created us and knows us.

Third, the Gospel invites us to know ourselves as God knows us. Knowing who we are is important. But our culture wrongly imagines this to be a solo project. The truth is none of us can know ourselves without the help of others. As small children, for example, our sense of self comes not from looking within but from looking into our parent's faces. As God's children, our sense of self comes from looking into the face of our Father in heaven. If we wish to find our true selves, do not look within. Rather look up.

I AM KNOWN, PART 3

Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honoured his name. "On the day when I act," says the Lord Almighty, "they will be my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him." (Malachi 3:16–17)

In his book, What Makes Us Tick, Hugh Mackay writes about Helen Bamber, a campaigner for the care of torture victims. Bamber describes the experience of holding a dying woman in her arms after the liberation of a concentration camp at the end of World War II. As the woman rasped out the horrific account of her experiences in the camp, Bamber said to her: "I am going to tell your story." This calmed the distressed woman. "I think she knew she was going to die," Bamber said. "She didn't want to die and [her story] not be told—that nobody would know. This was a woman anxious, even at her death, not to be ignored or forgotten. When all other desires have left us or become irrelevant, we are left with the desire to be acknowledged, identified, appreciated, and remembered."

"The mass of men live lives of quiet desperation," observed Thoreau. In a world where billions are overlooked and marginalised, and millions die with a mere handful of people at their funeral, comes the stunning news: God knows each of us, and every detail about us—every hope, fear and dream.

In Malachi 3, the Lord attentively listens in to a conversation between believers. The passage speaks of "a scroll of remembrance" being written in God's presence. It refers to the practice of ancient kings who would instruct their royal officials to keep a record of decisions, actions, events and accomplishments. The book of Esther for example tells of an event being "recorded in the book of the annals in the presence" (2:23) of king Xerxes. Later in the story of Esther, Xerxes "could not sleep; so, he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him." (6:1) Like this Persian king, God is "a great king" (as Malachi 1:14 says), who records and reads the story of your life.

The author of Known By God writes: "Interest in life stories has never been stronger than in our own day, with politicians, actors, and sports stars leading the way. Ordinary people too are keen to preserve the record of their lives, with social media providing opportunities to share everything from the mundane to the profound and extraordinary. Motivations vary. Some wish to bring attention to their accomplishments or unusual experiences, others to record their journey through illness or tragedy. Many wish to pass on their story to subsequent generations of their families. Malachi 3:16 indicates that God is writing the biographies of those who honour his name."

God shows a keen interest in every detail and turning point of your life. He keeps an account of your words and deeds. When you suffer unjustly, you can echo David's prayer: "Record my misery; list my tears on your scroll—are they not in your record?" (Psalm 56:8) When you feel insignificance, grief, failure, or a series of unfortunate events, take comfort that even in your darkest days, the God who does not sleep reads your life.

Why would God do this? Malachi answers: We are His "treasured possession," and He is "a father who has compassion."

I AM DELIGHTED IN

He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs. (Zephaniah 3:17, NLT)

God doesn't just love you. He likes you. When many of us hear that God loves us, we assume that He loves us in spite of who we are. Since His love is unconditional, He puts up with us, we think. But actually, when we are God's child, He also loves us because of who we are; the way He made us; and our special place in His heart. There's a hint of this in Ephesians 1: "In love [he adopted us] … in accordance with his pleasure" (v4–5). It is not only showing grace to the undeserving that brings Him pleasure. He takes pleasure in His children themselves.

In the Old Testament we read that, God delights in the welfare of his servant (Psalm 35:27); rejoices in doing us good (Jeremiah 32:41); and says to Israel, "You shall be called My Delight Is in Her "(Isaiah 62:4). In short, "The Lord takes pleasure in his people." (Psalm 149:4).

For a New Testament example, listen to the Father's words over Jesus at his baptism: "This is my Son, whom I love, with whom I am well-pleased" (Matthew 3:17). The Father delighted in His Son not because Jesus had done a ton of ministry (at that stage, He hadn't) or needed mercy (He didn't). Rather the Father delighted and still delights in His Son because He is delightful. He really, really likes His Son.

When a parent says to a child, "I love you," the child hopes that this is a stubborn love— "No matter how much you disappoint me, I won't give up on you." But they also hope that this is the love of delight— "I love your uniqueness and who you are to me; and I love being with you."

God likes you, really likes you. Sure, there may be some parts of you that He doesn't like—immorality, unbelief and self-centeredness displease Him. But even when He chastises us for our compromise or callousness, He delights in who He made us to be: "The Lord corrects him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights" (Proverbs 3:12).

When God looked over His unfallen creation and His image-bearing creatures in Genesis 1, He said it is "very good"! He loved it all, especially His children. Yet we are so used to speaking about God loving us despite who we are, that we forget that there's another kind of love that God has for us: it's the joy a maker finds in their creation, and the thrill a parent finds in their offspring. Ask a parent if they delight in their kids—their little quirks; their unique personality—all good parents do. Do we believe that God, the best Parent of all, has less delight in us than this?

If Jesus' love for His chosen ones was only the sacrificial sort, He would not be broken–hearted at their death—yet Jesus wept for His friend Lazarus. If Jesus only loved His friends because He was supposed to, He would not let them rest their heads on His chest. Still today, God's heart surges with tenderness toward us. When He prayed for the Philippians, Paul experienced Jesus' feelings for them rising up in Himself: "God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:8).

Read, once again, in Zephaniah 3:17 (at the top of this page) about the God who delights over us in song. We can almost imagine the Father in heaven setting His eyes upon one of His children on earth. Now the happy angels around Him begin to whisper to each other, "There He goes again with the singing!" But realize it's you that His heart is fixed on. And it's your name in His song.

I AM IN THE BELOVED

[Jesus prayed to the Father,] "May [my disciples] be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me... you loved me before the creation of the world... I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them." (John 17:21–26)

In Ephesians 1:6 we read that God's amazing love has been "freely given us in the One he loves." Many translations use "in the Beloved" in place of the phrase "in the One he loves." To put it another way I can say "I am loved in the One He loves' or more simply 'I am loved in the Beloved.' Let's break this down:

Jesus is the Father's Beloved. In His prayer, Jesus is One with the Father Who glorifies Him—i.e., enjoys Him and lifts Him up. The Father loves Jesus most emphatically. He has poured out love on His Son since eternity past ("before the creation of the world").

The Gospels record two times in Jesus' life when the Father lavished affection and love on His Son. First, there was Jesus' baptism in the river when a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." (Mark 1:11). Then years later, Jesus took three of his closest disciples with Him up a mountain and "a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am pleased. Listen to him!'" (Matthew 17:2–5)

In short, the Father adores His Son—always has, always will. This love is so powerful and overflowing that the Father, Son and Spirit created a universe and humanity in the first place!

You might need to be sitting down for what else we learn both in Jesus' John 17 prayer and in Ephesians 1:6: If you are in Christ, then the Father cherishes you **to the same degree** that He does His Son! Referring to us, Jesus prays, "[You] have loved them even as you have loved me." (John 17:23). Wow! All of the Father's affection for His Son is poured out upon us.

Peter O'Brien says it more theologically: "the one whom God loves" refers to Jesus' status as "God's Son and indicates that our own 'sonship' is due to being found in him ... The bounty which He lavishes on [us] consists in [our] being caught up into the love ... between the Father and the Son." Stupendously, the words spoken over Jesus in a river and on a mountain are declared over you: "This is My daughter ... My son ... whom I love, in whom I delight." And since the Father has loved the Son from eternity past, He is well capable of loving us until eternity future.

What did you do to deserve this amazing love? Nothing! Ephesians 1:6 says that it is something "he has freely given us."

But be warned: all hell is set on snatching this discovery from you. When Jesus left the river of baptism for the desert of testing, the heavenly voice became silent, the dove became invisible and a serpent-like creature taunted him: "If you are the Son of God ..." Notice that Satan cuts out the adjectives, making no mention of Jesus being the loved, the delighted–in Son. After eroding the truth of Jesus' identity down he challenges it altogether. He does the same to you. So, stand this day upon the deepest reality of your existence. You are loved in the Beloved.

WEEK
THREE

I AM REDEEMED

God has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
(Colossians 1:13–14)

These words by Paul to the Colossian church echo his words to the Ephesian one: "In [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins." (Ephesians 1:17). However, he adds more detail in the letter to the Colossians. In it, we learn four things about our redeemed identity:

First, before we were in Christ, we were in a domain of darkness. We might not realise it, but when we're not yet redeemed, we are hopelessly out of touch with ultimate reality. Ephesians 2:1–3 unpacks some sobering dimensions of this darkness: 1) Without Jesus, death is our destiny. In fact, we're already dead in our sins. 2) Satan holds us captive. 3) A sinful nature, even when we are at our best, dominates us. 4) Worst of all, we're under God's judgment. In this domain of darkness, though there may be exciting times in our lives, yet—from God's perspective—there is a tragic gloominess hanging over even our happiest moments. That's really bad news. Now for the good news.

Second, we now live in the kingdom of Christ. This is a kingdom of light (v12–13). In the Gospel, we come into contact with Jesus, who is ultimate reality. Life in the new heavens and earth is our destiny. We're promised immortal resurrection bodies. We're alive to Christ and are given authority over Satan. We have all we need to stay free from his traps. God has opened our eyes and turned us "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18). Best of all, we're under the gracious rule of our all-wise King.

Third, our freedom comes by God's intervention. Paul seems to have in mind the Israelites who were enslaved in Egypt. They were then delivered and redeemed by God—both by the sacrifice of a lamb, and by His power, which planted them in a new land. That ancient freeing of the Israelites points to what Jesus has done. In Christ, we have redemption, the forgiveness of sin. Our new identity documents are written in Christ's own blood, which is the price He pays for our release from spiritual slavery.

Fourth, there has been an instant transfer of citizenship. The moment we trust in Jesus, we forfeit our citizenship in the domain of darkness and are granted citizenship in the kingdom of light. This is not a ten-stage process that depends upon our level of godliness. It's a one-stage change of our entire lives in the sight of God. We are no longer slaves to sin, Satan, or death. We've been delivered and redeemed.

This motivates us to live as we should and re-assures us when we fail to do so. Imagine for example that we exchange citizenship from one country (e.g. Brazil) to another (e.g. Canada). Though we're now citizens in Canada, it will take some time to adjust to the new culture and values. We have to unlearn the ways of our previous country and learn the new customs and language. We may temporarily fall back into our old ways. But even so, we don't lose our new citizenship. Our identity as a citizen of the new country is secure. It is the same with our salvation: the moment we trust in Jesus, we're transferred into His Kingdom. We have to unlearn our old ways and learn how to live in the new Kingdom. It will take time to change our ways, but our mistakes will not revoke the citizenship given to us by His grace.

I AM FORGIVEN

Brothers and sisters … we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and … we have a great priest over the house of God … (Hebrews 10:19–21)

Paul announces in Ephesians 1:17 that "in [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins." The writer to the Hebrews, quoted above, speaks a similar word to his Jewish readers, but goes further.

Let's start with what both passages say: God's forgiveness and grace comes to us "by the blood of Jesus" (Hebrews) or "through his blood" (Ephesians).

The blood, here, refers to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, where He took the guilt of, and punishment for, our sins upon Himself. "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22). This secures our acceptance with God.

On the annual Day of Atonement, the high priest of ancient Israel would seek forgiveness for the entire nation's sins. After cleansing himself, he would lay his hands upon a bull and a goat, symbolically imparting the guilt of his and his people's sins to them. He'd sacrifice them, take some of their blood, and enter into the Most Holy Place. He would sprinkle it upon the Golden Ark—which represented God's throne in heaven. He'd ask for forgiveness for his own sins and for the sins of the nation (using the goat's blood).

What was happening here? In short, the high priest was the go-between, the mediator between the people and God. The sinful Israelites could not approach God, but the high priest went into the deepest presence of God and, using the sacrificed blood, sought to restore the broken connection between God and His people.

Hebrews shows us that Jesus is our Great High Priest. Unlike other high priests:

- Jesus did not need to offer blood for his own sins; unlike others he is "holy, blameless, pure, and set apart from sinners" (Hebrews 7:26).
- Jesus offered a sacrifice for the whole world, not just Israel. (Hebrews 7:27).
- Jesus offered blood not once a year, but once and forever. (Hebrews 9:12)
- Jesus did not offer the blood of another, but His own blood for our salvation (Hebrews 9:26),

Jesus sympathetically listens to our prayers. Our High Priest is able to "empathize with our weaknesses," therefore we can "approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Hebrews 4:15-16). Jesus does not endorse our sins, but He is compassionate towards the difficulties and frailties that make us more prone to them.

Jesus cleanses our consciences of shame. "How much more will the blood of Christ cleanse our consciences so that we may serve the living God!" (Hebrews 9:14). Blood was not just sprinkled on the ark. It was sprinkled on the people. Jesus is ready to touch our conscience and cleanse it, freeing us from the whirlpool of shame that our failures often lead to.

Jesus fervently prays for us. "Jesus is able to rescue completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (Hebrews 7:24-25). Ever feel so alone? Like no one knows what you're going through? In that very moment, Jesus has you covered in prayer.

I AM AWARE (OF GOD'S PURPOSE)

With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. (Ephesians 1:8–10)

The next dimension of our identity in Christ is that we are in an inner circle of special knowledge. The essential idea in the complicated sentence above is this: God has "made known to us" (v9) His purpose to "bring unity to all things … under Christ" (v10).

Paul calls this knowledge a "mystery" *(mustērion)*. Why? He knows that many of the non-Jewish people in the Ephesian church had been part of mystery cults before coming to Christ. In these cults, they would have been introduced to special knowledge about the meaning of the universe. He also knows that the Jewish people in the church, steeped in the Old Testament's prophets, would know of God's ability to "reveal mysteries" (Daniel 2:28) to His people. Paul knows that the ears of both the Jews and non-Jews will pick up as they hear the word "mystery." Both will be surprised that this secret is now an open secret, available to all who turn to Jesus.

What is God's open secret? At some point in the future, at the climax of all things—people and every aspect of creation—will be brought by God to find their place, in Jesus. Then, each created thing will also be united with every other thing in a great symphony.

Other translations of verse 10 say: "to bring all things together in Christ" (CEB); "to unite all things in him" (ESV); "to gather up all things in him" (NRSV); to "bring everything together under the authority of Christ" (NLT); and "the summing up of all things in Christ" (NASB).

Imagine our solar system suddenly without the sun—cold planets would shoot every which way in danger of colliding into each other. Lacking a centre, it is disintegrated and divided. Or think of an orchestra where every member plays whatever tune they each feel like—a terrible noise! This is the state of the world outside of Christ.

Genesis 1–2 describes God's ordered, harmonious creation. Chaos ensues in Genesis 3 when all relationships (between humans and God, each other, animals and the environment) rupture. Mark Roberts in his commentary on Ephesians says, "God's world is broken, though not completely dysfunctional because its created order continues to underlie all things. Nevertheless, like Humpty Dumpty, the world had a great fall, and 'all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put the world together again.'"

But Jesus, Who died on the cross to heal our broken relationships (with God, each other, and the rest of creation), will one day return to make all things right. Paul gives us the widest imaginable horizon for Jesus' work of re-unification—He will unite "all things in heaven and earth." God is not only interested in saving our souls. He is working to renew and heal **all** that is broken.

In our broken world, we get to proclaim God's mystery by living in light of a future world that will prosper peacefully under Jesus' reign. When our efforts to overcome injustice fail, when tragedy befalls us, when our closest relationships break down, or when the polarization of society tears us apart - we need not lose hope. Christ is the shining Sun and the Conductor of the symphony Who will bring all things to wholeness and harmony.

I AM DESTINED

In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace. … In him we were also chosen, [or "made heirs"] having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will. (Ephesians 1:5–6, 11)

What does Paul mean by us being predestined? Theologians have debated this idea vigorously (more than we have space to explain here), but when we read Paul's words carefully, we realise they are not an invitation to debate but to worship. When we grasp that God has chosen us because of His love for and pleasure in us, our hearts pour forth praise.

Each of us in Christ is destined with a unique purpose. In Ephesians 2:10, Paul writes these incredible words: "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." We are His unique masterpiece. A 'one-of-a-kind' creation. But it doesn't end there. The Master also created a unique destiny for us to live out. He made us on purpose and for His purpose.

What is our unique destiny? One of the best starting points to discover our purpose is to ask what is Christ's purpose in the world. His great purpose is to restore, renew, re-integrate and heal all things. This includes every ruptured relationship between God and us, and us and each other (v10). Our God-given purpose will be a small part of Christ's great purpose. We can ask Him to show us how to live out His purpose through our lives each and every day.

This will include how we go about our day-to-day activities and work. It has to do with how we interact with those around us. It includes our handling of finances, opportunities and apparent setbacks. We are helping bring His kingdom to earth through every act of love, generosity, kindness, faith and courage.

Stay encouraged! Our purpose and destiny will not be revealed to us all at once. Nor will it always be clear to us. And there may be times when we seem to be on target, only to have our efforts derailed by opposition or hardship. Even then, we should not despair, for God does not leave it up to us alone to fulfil our purpose. It is not completely up to us to work out everything in our strength and plan—it is God "who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (v11).

The best way to stay motivated and guided in the unfolding of our unique story is to stay connected to Christ. History is His-story. He is the Author of the Ultimate story. And He is also the Hero of the Ultimate story. Amazingly God has written us in as supporting roles into His Ultimate story. He had our roles in mind before the story even began!

As the author of The Purpose Driven Life says: "The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfilment, … peace of mind, or … happiness … family … career … or wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God."

I AM INTENDED (FOR GOD'S GLORY)

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us … with every spiritual blessing in Christ. … In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship … to the praise of his glorious grace. … In him we were [made heirs] … in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. … [We] are God's possession—to the praise of his glory."
(Ephesians 1:3, 5, 11–12, 14)

What modern translations of Ephesians 1 hide is that everything from verse 3 to verse 14 is a single sentence. Some 200 words long, it starts with the word "praise" ("Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus"), is peppered through with praise ("to the praise of his glorious grace" and "for the praise of his glory"), and finally ends with praise ("—to the praise of his glory").

Why has God blessed us? So we praise His glory. Why has He adopted us in love? So we praise His glory. Why has God taken us as His very own? So we praise His glory.

If we take all of this together, we learn perhaps the most important aspect of our identity in Christ: I am for the praise of God's glory and grace. Don't miss the fact that, as important as our identity in Christ is, who God and Christ are to us is the real prize! God loves us best by giving us the best to enjoy forever—Himself.

Now for some Q&A. **What is God's glory?** "God's glory is the magnificence, worth, loveliness, and grandeur of His many perfections." (Fred Zaspel's Concise Theology). Read that sentence again slowly … His glory is the magnificence, worth, loveliness, and grandeur of His many perfections!

What is God's grace? Many a child in Children's Church has been taught that the letters in the word "grace" stand for God's Riches At Christ's Expense. So true! God's grace is both the motive and the method of our salvation. It motivated God to send His Son for us because He prefers to not treat us as our sins deserve. It is also his method: by shedding "his blood … in accordance with the riches of God's grace," He lavishes undeserved mercy on us. How kind!

What, then, is meant, in verse 5, by "God's glorious grace"? This: of all God's many perfections, His grace is the apex of them all. By the way, Paul is not spouting off dry theological information here. He speaks from experience. Elsewhere, he writes, "Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy …The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly … I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life." (1 Timothy 1:13–16)

Finally, what is the effect of praising Jesus and His grace? We experience more awe and joy. Look up to the night sky—many of those pinprick stars are actually entire galaxies. A microscope exaggerates the size of what we see, but a telescope makes clearer what is in fact astoundingly large. In the same way, when we start to understand the infinite glory and majesty of the Galaxy-Maker, we are swept off our feet and up into a spirit of praise!

How thrilling, then, that "every thing of God gets expressed in [Jesus], so you can see and hear Him clearly. You don't need a telescope, a microscope, or a horoscope to realize the fullness of Christ, and the emptiness of the universe without him" (Colossians 2:9, MSG).

I AM SEALED (WITH THE SPIRIT)

Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples, and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"
They answered, "No, we haven't heard there is a Holy Spirit."
So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"
"John's baptism," they replied.
Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus."
On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.
There were about twelve men in all.
(Acts 19:1–7)

Paul in Ephesians 1 refers back to this story, it seems, when years later he writes to the Ephesian community that probably included these twelve men, and says, "When you believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory." (v13–14).

Paul tells these twelve men that placing their faith in John's prophetic ministry is not enough—they need to place their faith in Jesus' Messianic ministry. They eagerly do so, get baptized and are introduced by Paul in a time of prayer to the tangible experience of the Spirit's presence and power.

Still today, when we place our trust in Jesus, the Spirit of God takes up residence in our lives, and He desires to fill us to overflowing. Paul refers to the Holy Spirit's indwelling and infilling as a seal.

In the ancient Greco-Roman world, seals on letters or containers indicated five things:

First, a seal spoke of authenticity. They verified that an article was genuine. When the Holy Spirit marks us, He imprints the presence of Jesus in our lives—our salvation is the real deal.

Second, a seal indicated authority. Official scrolls of kings were sealed to show that the documents were backed by the full authority of the king's power and wealth.

Third, a seal implied a future opening. This is why Paul in this letter later refers to "the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." The best is yet to come.

Fourth, a seal spoke of ownership. It designated whose property the thing is, who it belongs to. In those days, for example, sheep were branded with a seal to stop them from being stolen. A strange biblical prophecy tells of the servants of God having a seal (Revelation 7:3)—a mark—on their foreheads to show Whose they are.

Christians may debate whether it's okay to get a tattoo. What few realize is they already have one! Paul addresses many ex-pagans who had been marked with the sign of the god they worshipped. Similarly, says Paul, to have the Spirit is to be "marked with a seal"—God's sign of ownership in the inmost being of every Jesus follower.

Finally, a seal denoted protection. No matter how rough the passage, a carrier of a sealed letter would guard that letter with his life. No matter what testing, battles, and sufferings come upon us, we are secure.

What can break the seal of God? Nothing. And who can undo what the Holy Spirit does? No one. "Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts" (2 Corinthians 1:21–22). We are sealed.

WEEK
FOUR

I AM INDWELT (BY THE SPIRIT)

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.
(John 7:37–39)

In the centuries-old Bethlehem Chapel in Prague, there's a strange feature in one of the sanctuary's corners: a huge well. Legend has it that locals had once spoiled the water source by throwing their unwanted babies down the well. The horrific scene created two burdens: the tragedy of lost life, and the loss of usable water. To not forget about the lost lives, the artwork on the chapel's walls featured the murdered innocent babies. And to provide a viable water source, the congregants dug the well just metres from the pulpit. A door was built into the side of the church so people could draw from the protected water source, even during services.

In Christ, we, too, may serve as a fountain of the Spirit for others to drink from. We have discovered that the Holy Spirit seals us. Notice next what Ephesians 1 says: "When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit …" See that? The Holy Spirit is … promised.

Who promised the Spirit? And what exactly was promised? In two passages, Isaiah the prophet foretold of God's Spirit being "poured out." The devastation Israel was to experience soon after the time of Isaiah would last "till the Spirit is poured upon us from on high" (Isaiah 32:15). At that time, God says, "I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring." (Isaiah 44:3–4). Likewise, the prophet Joel spoke for God: "I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days." (Joel 2:28–29) Echoing these earlier Old Testament prophets, the New Testament prophet John the Baptiser spoke of the Messiah as one who would, "baptise you with the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 3:11). In all these promises, the Spirit is compared to water—the land drinks up and is made green by the deluge of rain; the desert is revitalized by a flowing river; people are plunged into His presence as if being dunked in a pool.

Jesus, then, picked up on these water–promises, and developed them some more: the Spirit will be like water to drink—"whoever is thirsty come to me and drink"—that transforms us into a fountainhead—"rivers of living water will flow from within." In Christ the Holy Spirit flows into us and then through us to others.

Jesus uttered these words at Jerusalem's Festival of Tabernacles, as thousands gathered in the temple courts to witness a ritual. Crowds in tow, the high priest carried a water-filled golden vessel towards the bronze bowl at the altar to be poured out. Suddenly a voice interrupted: "Come to me all you who are thirsty … out of you will flow streams of living water."

What a joy to drink of our Saviour, to be immersed in the waterfall of God's Spirit Who refreshes, revitalizes and makes green our lives.

What parts of your life can do with a fresh dousing of heaven's rain? Do you realize that God wants to transform you into a fountainhead of His goodness and nearness to others? If so, who are the spiritually thirsty people God might be sending you to?

I AM GOD'S TEMPLE

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honour God with your bodies.
(1 Corinthians 6:19–20)

In Ephesians 1:13–14 we discover that the Spirit comes to live in us and with us. Elsewhere Paul develops this idea—he compares, first, our bodies and, second, our churches to a temple inhabited by God's personal presence.
When Christ made His invisible entry into the cities of Corinth and Ephesus through Paul's preaching of the gospel, He did not choose to purchase any physical property. Rather, He purchased people, and made them His home.

That we are God's temple blows the mind! When David in 1000 BC thought about the building of the Jerusalem temple for the true God, he said, "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27) It boggles the mind, then, to think that the One who fashioned the stars would choose to inhabit our tiny bodies!

That we are God's temple changes our way of life. Since Christ purchased us and the Spirit has made us His home we are to "honour God with [our] bodies." What we look at, say, do, and think about matters to God. Addictions, poor self-care and sins of the body are as unacceptable as desecrating a sacred physical temple. We are to steward all our intellectual and physical abilities for the glory of God. Spurgeon, an old preacher, used to say, "Before we knew Christ, we offered our bodies to sin like a stallion to a rider. Now that we're privileged to draw the chariot of Christ, dare we be an idle, non-cooperative donkey?"

Together, we are a temple. As wonderful as it is to have all of God alive in my person, this does not mean that we do not need others in community. This is why Paul also teaches that every local church is a temple of Jesus (the community of people, not a building).

The cities of Corinth and Ephesus hosted many impressive religious temples in which people gathered to worship their gods. For example, Corinth was built around a hilltop called the Acrocorinth, upon which a massive temple to Aphrodite existed. There were also the great temples to Poseidon, Apollo, Demeter and Isis. The disciples of Jesus in these cities, however, had no formal meeting place, because they were the meeting place. "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?" Paul asks the Corinthians. "God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple." (1 Corinthians 3:16–17)

Paul says the same thing to the Ephesian church: "You are … members of [God's] household … with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (Ephesians 2:19–22).

The true temple in Corinth was not made of brick and mortar but of mobile, living stones—though outwardly unimpressive, the motley crew that was the Corinthian church would gather together and those who visited would "fall down and worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you!'" (1 Corinthians 14:25)

I AM GUARANTEED (AN ETERNITY)

When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession. (Ephesians 1:13–14)

In Ephesians 1, some aspects of our identity focus on the past: "we received redemption by his blood, the forgiveness of sins." Other aspects home in on the present: I am blessed, I am loved in the Beloved. I am sealed by the Spirit. Then there are aspects of our identity in Christ that look to the future.

The Holy Spirit is a deposit guaranteeing our future with God. Said another way, the promise that has been fulfilled—the Spirit's presence—is also a promise that is yet to be fulfilled—a glorious inheritance.

The Greek word for "deposit" is *arrabōn*. It is sometimes translated as "down payment" or "pledge" or "first installment." The theologian Peter O'Brien comments: "The Spirit received is the first installment and guarantee of the inheritance in the age to come that awaits God's sons and daughters."

The word *arrabōn* shows up often in ancient Greek as a technical term for the first sum of money paid in advance to validate a legal contract or secure an article of some kind. This deposit was not returnable—it spoke of absolute commitment.

Paul uses the word three times. Each time it refers to the dynamic presence of the Spirit in the believer. In 2 Corinthians 1:21–22, Paul says that the down payment of the Spirit makes us "stand firm in Christ." Then in 2 Corinthians 5:3–5, he says that the Spirit is surety that one day our mortal bodies will be swallowed up not by death, but by life! "Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." Our bodies may be ageing, and death's door comes closer, but—because of the guarantee of the Spirit we have nothing to fear and everything to look forward to.

The Kingdom of God comes upon us in two stages. Ultimately, when Jesus returns it will utterly engulf the cosmos and we who are in Christ. But already now, we have a small but real sample of that future reality—enough to both satisfy us and to also cause us to long for what will one day come in full.

The little child who's just awoken too early, wonders if the day will ever come. Then arrives the first glimmer of dawn and the tweeting birds. She is assured that the brightness of the sun is on its way. A shop owner wonders if the sale of his most expensive product will go through. He need not worry—he has already received the deposit for the item. The bride anticipates her wedding, but wonders if the man of her dreams will follow through. To cast off doubt, she looks at the engagement ring that pledges the day will come. The believer wonders if the gift of eternal life they have received will really last for all eternity. They need not be concerned—God has already given them a guarantee: the Holy Spirit lives in them.

Paul uses a similar analogy for the Spirit elsewhere. The Spirit is "firstfruits," says Paul in Romans 8:23. The bountiful harvest of redemption is coming. We know this for sure, for we hold in our hands the first pickings of fruit.

I AM PRECIOUS TO GOD

You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ... Out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Exodus 19:4-6)

You are not your own. So far we have already learnt that in Christ we become saints—set apart by God for His exclusive use. We have been purchased by Jesus' blood. We have been sealed by God's Spirit. In the same way an ancient slave may have had their owner's name etched into their skin, or in the way a pagan worshipper had been tattooed with their god's name—we are marked as God's.

In Ephesians 1 Paul speaks of "the redemption of those who are God's possession" (v14). We belong to God. We are His possession. This echoes the words from Exodus 19 (above) - "you will be my treasured possession" - words spoken to the nation of Israel soon after they had been freed from slavery.

The apostle Peter applies these words to all Jesus' followers: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession." (1 Peter 2:9) Let's unpack the common ideas:

I am treasured by God. Notice these words: "I ... brought you to myself." We'd think God would say, "I brought you to freedom," or "I brought you across the Red Sea to this mountain." But, no, first and foremost, God brings us to Himself. We are His "treasured possession," or—as Peter says—God's "special possession."

Apparently, God knows the human feeling of having something or someone to ourselves that makes us feel rich. To Israel God says, "The whole earth is mine"—but what can you give to a God who already has everything? He has the mountains, the seas, the stars, the planets. Yet there's something that makes even God feel rich—treasure that He keeps very close to His heart. It's you.

I am a priest. Moses declared that God was making Israel "a kingdom of priests." Peter, also, affirmed that in Christ we become part of "a royal priesthood." Of the twelve tribes of Israel, the Levites were specially chosen to be priests with the privilege of serving in God's temple; functioning as mediators who represented God to the other tribes; and offering sacrifices on their behalf to God. What does it mean, then, that everyone in Christ is a priest?

First, as priests it's our privilege to come very close to God. What a joy to have VIP access to the throne of God directly through the mediation of our High Priest, Jesus!

Second, as priests it's our privilege to represent God to the world. God loved the whole ancient world so much that He chose Israel as His priestly nation to witness to the other nations. Similarly, God loves the world today so much He chooses His priestly church to "declare the praises of him who [calls people] out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9)

Third, as priests it's our privilege to offer sacrifices. The New Testament writers used this as a metaphor for Christian devotion. We get to offer our "bodies as a living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1-2); to "walk in the way of love, just as Christ ... gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:2); and to "offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name." (Hebrews 13:15).

I AM PRECIOUS TO GOD, PART 2

Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me." Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me. Your children hasten back, and those who laid you waste depart from you. Lift up your eyes and look around; all your children gather and come to you. ... [y]ou will wear them all as ornaments; you will put them on, like a bride."
(Isaiah 49:14–18)

Barry Webb notes about God's words above through Isaiah: "the images are mixed... but they all affirm God's love for His people and His tireless commitment to their welfare."

In the previous reading we stumbled upon the magnificent discovery that we are "those who are God's possession" (Ephesians 1:14). As God's possession, we're both purchased by Jesus' blood, and sealed by the Spirit's indwelling.

We belong to Another. God has taken hold of our lives with an unbreakable grip. He says, "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10)

But Isaiah's prophecy reveals more. Not only are we in God's hands—we're on them, too.

You are on God's hands. Tattooed by the Spirit, we belong to God. But notice that God has carved our names into His being, too. As Preston Sprinkle says, "The Greeks and Romans got a tattoo to show allegiance to their god. For instance, King Ptolemy IV tattooed his body with ivy leaves to show his devotion to Dionysus, the god of wine. God's tattoo is probably similar to Ptolemy's, only God turns the meaning on its head. While Ptolemy and other kings were running around flaunting their devotion to their god—your God sits on His throne and declares, 'I'm devoted to you! And I've put My palms under the needle to prove it.'"

Other than your name, there's another mark of love and devotion on the divine hands—Jesus' hands in heaven still bear the marks of the cross. We might even think of the nails on the cross as the very needles by which He engraved your name in His palms.

You are on God's mind. It is at least possible that a mother may forget the child born to her. But this is impossible for God. Indeed, we are always on His mind.

Isaiah compares God first to a mother, then to a city architect. A God Who tirelessly thinks about the lines and shapes of our lives— "your walls are ever before me." That each one of us take up this much of God's mind is remarkable.

To be fair, however, we are part of a much greater "city" God is building—a city populated by all God's children who gather. Each takes their place in God's arms and in His bigger plan.

You are on God's heart. So, we are on God's hand, and we are on His mind. One more. We are also—Isaiah prophesies—on God's heart! Throughout history people have worn necklaces with some symbol or portrait of their loved ones. The adornments on a bride especially symbolize the one she cherishes. The significance of a necklace is that it holds that person close to the heart. How lucky we are, then, to be the prized jewels that God wears on His heart.

I AM A SISTER OR BROTHER

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. (Ephesians 1:15-16)

Ephesians 1 has already affirmed that God is "our Father" (v2), and that in Christ we are each adopted as God's child (v5). In the verse immediately after today's passage, Paul will return to the privilege of knowing God as our Father (v17). It's no surprise then that the Ephesian church, who understood this, came to have a "love for all God's people"—we are spiritual brothers and sisters to each other.

Search the entire New Testament for what the early Christians preferred to call each other. The top answer is, in Greek, *adelphoi*. Used over 100 times in the book of Acts and in Paul's letters, it literally means "brothers," but the ancient world understood it to mean "siblings" or "brothers and sisters" when addressed to a mixed crowd. Most contemporary English Bible translations opt for "brothers and sisters," because the modern reader would (mis)understand "brothers" to refer only to men.

Amazingly, historians know of no other ancient community who used this term as frequently as followers of Jesus did. Unlike the Epicureans or Cynics who preferred to call each other friends, Christians preferred to call each other siblings. Trusting in the same blood, and calling on the same Father, they received each other as family.

As siblings in God's family we are commanded to love: "Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters," writes the author of Hebrews (13:1). The same author also details three ways we may love one another as siblings: "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another." (10:24–25)

First, get to know one another. The Greek literally says, "let us consider one another to see how we may spur one another on." The word for "consider" *(katanoeo)* means to pay attention to and look closely at. In Genesis 4, God asks Cain if he knows where Abel is. Cain replies, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The answer is yes. As Sam was to Frodo in the Lord of the Rings, so we need to be alert to the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters that make them susceptible to discouragement and compromise.

Second, encourage one another. Henri Nouwen writes, "Christian community is the place where we keep the flame of hope alive among us so that it can grow and become stronger in us." The Greek word for "spur" *(paroxysmoi)* means "outburst." It was used in the ancient world to refer to outbursts of anger or even high fever. But here it is used positively. We are to provoke each other to "outbursts" of demonstrated love. Isolated, we are so easily "hardened by sin's deceitfulness" (Hebrews 3:13). Together, however, our God-given strength becomes the strength of others too, even as their God-given joy, becomes our joy too.

Third, commit to gather. Many of the readers of Hebrews were discouraged, which led them to avoid the thing they needed most— gathering with faith-filled brothers and sisters. Yet it is God's will for us that we meet together—in homes and in gathered worship— to help and encourage each other.

WEEK FIVE

I AM A CHILD OF GOD

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.
(Ephesians 1:17)

Today we return to our identity as God's child, mentioned already in Ephesians 1:5, which speaks of our "adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ."

Paul's prayer from verse 17 onwards is that our head knowledge would explode also in our hearts—releasing the shrapnel of revelation in us. It's one thing intellectually believing that I am God's child and that God is my Father. It's another to experience—by supernatural insight—myself as God's child, and God as my Father.

What does it mean to have God as your Father? There are at least five wonderful dimensions to being God's child. We explore three today and two tomorrow.

First, with God as my Father, I can know that I am the apple of His eye. Paul's words in Romans 8:14— "All those who are led by the Spirit are children of God"—echoes a verse in the Old Testament: "God found him in a desert land, he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye" (Deuteronomy 32:10). God is not only our Creator, taking a general interest in us, He is our Father taking a particular interest in us. Although He has many children, He loves each of us as much as He loves His first (John 17:23). Each of us who is redeemed is the apple of His eye. Imagine a preschool teacher with twenty kids in her class—she takes interest in all of them. But one of them is her child—we can be sure she pays even more attention. So it is with our Father.

Second, with God as my Father, I can enjoy a close relationship with Him. The Spirit enables us to enjoy intimate access to the Father. "By him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'" (Romans 8:15). "Abba" is Aramaic, the language of Palestine, for "Father." Affectionately used by little children, it is similar to Papa or Daddy. Small children of all cultures tend to latch onto these two-syllable names for their parents. It speaks of an implicit trust and dependency. When Jesus first called God, "Abba, Father," in front of His disciples (Mark 14:36), they must have been startled by the possibility of relating so intimately to God.

Christianity alone of the major religions emphasizes a parent-child intimacy between God and ourselves. Islam does not believe God is a Father. The biography, I Dared To Call Him Father, tells of a Muslim woman who started reading the Bible alongside the Quran. Realising the essential message of these two books was incompatible, she cried out, " God, which is Your book?" She tells how God spoke back to her in a near-audible way: "The one by which You can call me Father."

Third, with God as my Father, I have unrestricted access to Him. Surrounded by bodyguards, most of the important people in the world—celebrities or presidents—are beyond our personal access. Picture an ancient king seated on his throne, with his guards standing upright all around him. If someone approaches him uninvited, they risk their lives. Now picture a small person suddenly running into the throne room and jumping onto his lap. It's his child! In the gospel, the most important Person in the universe is in reach. He is always available, and not too busy or distracted for us. His door is always open. We simply cannot interrupt Him from something more important He may be doing, for His heart is to love His children.

I AM A CHILD OF GOD, PART 2

If you [parents] then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!
(Matthew 7:11)

At the heart of our new identity in Christ is our "adoption to sonship" (Ephesians 1:5). The sheer privilege of this new status beckons us to get to "to know [our Father] better" (Ephesians 1:17). Yesterday, we contemplated three advantages to having God as our Father: I can know that I am the apple of His eye; I can enjoy a close relationship with Him; and I have unrestricted access to Him. Today, we explore two more:

Fourth, with God as my Father, I can bring every need I have to Him. Good parents meet the true needs and even some of the wants of their children in the wisest way. Psalm 103, one of only two Psalms that speaks of God as our Father, says, "As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him." In light of the Fatherly care of God, the Psalm also lists the kinds of care God wants to provide for us:

When we have done something stupid, our Father takes us as we are, "forgiving all our sins' (v3). When our body is broken, sick or hurting, we can ask Him to heal us for He is able "to heal all our diseases" (v3). When our circumstances leave us feeling stuck in a hole or out of options, He is able "to redeem our lives from the pit" (v4). When we feel dishonoured or overlooked, He is the Father who "crowns us with love and compassion" (v4).

He is able to take our unfulfilled longings and "satisfy our desires with good things" (v5). When we're tired and weary we can ask our Father to "renew our youth like the eagle's" (v5). When we're victims of injustice we can call on the God who "works justice for all oppressed" to act on our behalf (v6). Whatever we need—guidance, provision, protection—we can call out "Abba Father, help me." Our prayers will not fall on deaf ears or a heart of stone.

Fifth, with God as my Father, I can heal from the wounds of my parent's flaws. If even our earthly parents or closest friends abandon us, we can still say to them, as Jesus said to His disciples: "You may leave me alone, but the Father is still with me" (John 16:32). No matter what life threw at Jesus or took from Him, Jesus knew that the Father was enough for Him.

Few people have as much power to bless us or break us as our parents do. Yet, even the best parents tend to make mistakes. How do we heal from the failures of our parents? (And if we have children, how do we become better parents?) We get to know our heavenly Father. As David wrote, "Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me" (Psalm 27:10).

Were your parents aloof and disinterested? Our heavenly Father is intimate and involved. Were they insensitive and uncaring? He is kind and compassionate. Were they stern and demanding? He accepts us and delights in us with singing. Were they passive and cold? He is warm and affectionate. Were they absent or too busy for you? He is always with us and will never forsake us. Were they impatient and easily angered? He is patient and slow to anger. Were they mean, cruel and abusive? He is loving, gentle and protective.

Our heavenly Father promises to lead you on a path that is good, pleasing and perfect. He is full of grace and mercy, even giving you the freedom to fail. Your Father's strong arms are wide open, and you may rest your head on His tender-hearted chest.

I AM A CHILD OF GOD, PART 3

The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, you have received the Spirit of adoption. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'"
(Romans 8:15)

When God gives us "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation" so that we can "know [our glorious Father] better" (Ephesians 1:17), what else will change in our lives? Romans 8:15 gives an answer—we will be set free from slavery to fear.

The human experience is a scary one. Before Jesus moves into our lives, we are by nature slaves to fear. We may learn to cover up our insecurities from others—and maybe even from ourselves—by developing a brash confidence; or distracting ourselves in a whirlwind of busyness; or achieving success; or amassing wealth and friends whom we believe will protect us into the future. Nonetheless, the fears remain.

When we become children of God, however, the Spirit deals with that fear, freeing us from it. Yet Paul knows that it is still possible for us to fall into that old fear once again. What fears may be eased by standing upon our identity as God's child?

First, no longer fear falling short of God's standards. The life of godliness is not the life of pushing a big rock of impossible demands up a mountain only to have it roll back over us when we think we're making progress. Rather, life in the Spirit introduces us to a godliness that is a co-operative adventure with the Holy Spirit who "works in us to act and to will according to God's purposes" (Philippians 2:13).

Second, no longer fear the intimidating works of Satan. The devil hates God's wonderful creation and wants to "steal, kill and destroy" (John 10:10). Sometimes he uses subtle means and other times more obvious ways. Some people have first-hand experience of afflicting curses or evil spirits that can cause harm or terror. In the Gospel however, "the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (16:20).

Third, no longer fear the "wickedness" within. It is true that there remain deep layers of sin even in the redeemed believer, but we are covered by the righteousness of Jesus. An understanding of the depths of our sin is essential for us to receive Christ's forgiveness. But an over-reflection on our failures can lead to a fear-filled discouragement. When we look within and Satan tempts us to despair, we need to look up and see our older brother Jesus, who put an end to all our sin. We are becoming more and more like Him.

Fourth, no longer fear God's punishment. There is such a thing as God's discipline: "Do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves and accepts us his child." (Hebrews 12:6)

But look carefully at this verse. God will rebuke us if needs be, but He will not reject us. He may discipline us, but He will not punish us. The punishment our sins deserve has already fallen on Christ. When Jesus died on the cross, God took our sins and put them on Him and punished them there. The wedge that separates the sinner from their God is removed through Christ, and instead is driven between the believer and their sin.

What joy is ours to know that we do not need to live paralysed by these fears. As children of God, the Holy Spirit has set us free to be fearlessly loved by our amazing Father.

I AM A CHILD OF LIGHT

You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. This is why it is said: "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."
(Ephesians 5:8–14)

The author of The Blessing tells of a meeting with Lynda on a blistering summer's day. Though most people wore light clothing, she—a tall, attractive twenty-year-old—wore a heavy, long-sleeved black dress. He would later find out that black was the only colour she wore, for she had grown up with a cruel, abusive father addicted to alcohol and horror movies. When she was five, he'd force her to watch gruesome films as he laughed at her cries of fear. He died when she was a teen—but it wasn't the horror scenes that haunted her. It was his nickname for her: "demon daughter," a name that burned its way into her heart, affected the way she dressed on a searing summer day, and caused a gloom to hang over her life.

Thankfully, Lynda's story is one of great hope, not hurt. Through a loving church, she came to know Jesus personally and traded in her old nickname for a new one: "child of light." God's love broke through to Lynda's heart in a dramatic way. Today, she is married to a devoted Christian man, wears a radiant smile, and has a wardrobe full of beautiful clothes of all colours.

Next in Ephesians 1, Paul prays that "the eyes of [our] heart may be enlightened ..." (Ephesians 1:18). The Greek word for "enlightened" is photizo. It derives from the Greek word for "light". Later in Paul's letter, in the fifth chapter, he says a lot more about the theme of light, applying it to our identity in Christ. Let's break down some of the ideas in Ephesians 5.

First, outside of Christ we were darkness. Darkness refers to spiritual blindness, and to the way we hide our sin and shame from others in unholy secrecy.

Second, in Christ we became light. Jesus is "the light of the world" (John 8:12). In Him we are not only in the light but the light is in us—to such a degree that we can be described as light itself. We are not only transferred from a dark realm to a light realm—our very identity is transformed.

Third, live as child of light. Since you are no longer darkness but now are light, live as children of light, says Paul. Let your identity in Christ shine through your daily life. What might that look like? Three things are mentioned: a commitment to goodness, to righteousness, and to truth.

Fourth, seek to awaken other people to the light of Jesus. Paul quotes a short line from a hymn of the early church: "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." As we shine Jesus' light, share the story of God's grace-awakening in our own lives, and tell people about Jesus, the Light of the world, we communicate to people: "Wake up! You are in the sleep of spiritual death. You are in danger. Believe in Jesus. Rise from the dead. And Christ will shine on you." Then what is "illuminated, becomes a light"—the light that once shone into us and turned us into light now shines into them, turning them into light.

I AM CALLED

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. … [T]wo angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, … asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"
"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.
He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"
Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."
Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out …
(John 20:11–16)

Next in Ephesians 1 comes Paul's prayer that "the eyes of [our] heart may be enlightened in order that [we] may know the hope to which he has called [us]" (v18). Perhaps the best example in the Biblical record of an individual being called to this hope is the story of Mary Magdalene's encounter with Jesus at the empty tomb above.

First, Mary's meeting with Jesus shows how Jesus calls each of us to hope. Just the day before, Mary had witnessed Jesus being crucified. She had helped to bury Him. She had been devoted to Jesus, and His death spelt the end of her hopes. Yet, when she witnessed the Risen Lord, all that changed—as it does for everyone who trusts in the One who overcame the grave. As Peter says, "Praise be to the God and Father … In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1 Peter 1:3)

The English word "hope" in Paul's prayer does not properly capture Paul's meaning. In English it means an uncertain but preferred future. We may say, "I hope I pass," "I hope I win" or "I hope it all goes to plan." But in this world there are no guarantees—many people, for example, have lost the fortunes they were storing up for their old age. In contrast, the "hope" Jesus calls us to is as certain as it is wonderful. As Peter goes on to say, we have "an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade … kept … for you, … shielded by God's power." (1 Peter 1:4–5)

Second, Mary's encounter is a sample of Jesus calling each of us by name. It is only when Mary hears Jesus say her name that she realizes Who He is. Earlier in John's Gospel, Jesus promised that He would "call his own sheep by name and lead them out" (John 10:3) into a hope-filled life (John 10:10). Now He does precisely that with Mary. John Calvin comments: "The voice of the shepherd enters into Mary's heart, opens her eyes, arouses all her senses, and affects her in such a manner, that she immediately surrenders herself to Christ. Thus in Mary we have a lively image of our calling."

Third, Mary's encounter demonstrates Jesus using us to call others to the same hope. This life-changing hope transforms Mary's life. Interestingly the very next thing Jesus tells her to do is to go to the others and tell them what she has seen and heard (John 20:17) She does not remain silent. Immediately Mary ran to the other disciples with the message of hope: "I have seen the Lord!" (John 20:18) Just as Mary was called to carry the message of hope to the others, we too, are called to carry the message of Christ's hope to all of those around us - "I have seen the Lord!"

I AM GOD'S INHERITANCE

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know … the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people. (Ephesians 1:18)

Next, Paul prays that we could discern the spiritual wealth He has invested in His people—in particular the way God takes joy in His people as an heir might prize their priceless inheritance. It is an astonishing idea – God's riches are invested in His holy people, and He will enjoy us as an "inheritance" for all eternity. Through Christ's death, He purchased us (Revelation 5:9). He saw the value in us that we do not see in ourselves.

Guided by Paul's prayer, we are not to think of ourselves only individually, but collectively, too. The reason each of us can say, "I am God's wealth" is that we are God's wealth. This changes our perception of the church and other believers. We may be well aware how outwardly unimpressive and often problem-filled churches and believers are, but, with our eyes wide open, we will see how staggeringly rich they and we are.

Let's consider a Biblical and then a movie example. When the recently liberated Israelites, still on their way to the promised land, camped on the plain near Moab, the Moabite king tried to pay a non-Jewish prophet named Balaam to put a curse on them.

Numbers 23–24 recalls the many times Balaam climbed upon a nearby hill, about to curse them, only to have his eyes suddenly opened to God's surprisingly positive perspective of these people: "The Lord their God is with them; the shout of the King is among them. The people rouse themselves like a lion. … Like valleys they spread out, like gardens beside a river, like aloes planted by the Lord, like cedars beside the waters. Water will flow from their buckets; their seed will have abundant water. … A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel."

Where onlookers may have observed an alienated, kingless, and impoverished people, Balaam saw what God saw—these people were God's own people, vested with untold privilege, power and promise.

Now for a movie example: the kingdom of Wakanda in Black Panther, the Marvel blockbuster. These people in the heart of Africa long ago settled where a meteorite made of vibranium once struck. Wakanda's plant life mutated as a result of the metal's radiation, providing superhuman powers to those who ingested them. The world observes them as a small, unsophisticated and landlocked nation full of herdsmen. However, the truth is hidden in plain sight. To protect themselves from the chaos slowly consuming the rest of the world, they use their vibranium-powered technology to create a cloaking field that hides them in plain sight.

What a cinematic thrill it is to see open countryside suddenly give way to the Golden City as the cloak is removed. So, too, Jesus' tribe is different from all others. Heaven's treasure—Jesus Himself—descended to our planet and we are planted in Him. Powerful as Wakanda's plants may have been, Christ surrounds us with His glory so that we are like lush gardens, aloes, cedars. The Spirit flows among and from us like water from buckets. We have "the shout of the king" in our midst—Jesus is the Star of David who shines over us. The Lion of Judah vests us with lion-like authority. Yet, despite the fact of our spiritual wealth and royalty, we cloak ourselves with the humility of servants. There is a major difference, however, between Wakandans and Jesus followers. Whereas they have treasure in their rocks and plants, we ourselves are God's glorious treasure.

WEEK
SIX

I AM AN HEIR

Now if we are children, then we are also heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.
(Romans 8:17)

In the previous day, we learned that we are God's inheritance. But Ephesians 1 also reminds us that "in Christ we were also made heirs" (v11), and that the Spirit guarantees "our inheritance" (v14). In other words, your personal inheritance is a tiny subsection of God and Christ's vast inheritance.

The idea of inheritance is a dominant Biblical theme. Abraham was promised land as his family's inheritance. Later, his descendants, the Israelites, were redeemed from Egypt and promised, in the future, inheritance. But this would require patience and difficulty as their enemies would be driven out little by little, until they became fruitful and inherited the promised land (Exodus 23:30). This land would then be divided up and parcelled out to each family—perhaps a hillside farm overlooking the sea of Galilee, or an apartment in Jericho. David later applied this concept to the unique blessings and ministry God gives to us over the decades: "The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places. Surely, I have a delightful inheritance." (Psalm 16:6).

What do we learn from today's leading passage, Romans 8:17, about our inheritance?

First, your adoption lines you up for an inheritance. If we are sure that we are the children of God, then we can be sure we have an inheritance allocated to us. Adoption is instant and unconditional. Once we have it, we can never lose it. Inheritance, however, is slower in coming.

Second, there may be a conditional aspect to our inheritance. Paul uses the word "if"—"we are co-heirs with Christ, if ..." We do not earn it, because Christ purchased it for us. But we do play a very significant part, so it can be called "a reward." For example, in Colossians 3:24, Paul says, "You will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward." Though all believers are equally adopted, loved and assured of heaven, not all are equally rewarded, because not all are equally faithful.

Third, inheritance comes in part in this life and more fully in the next. In the new heavens and earth, we will "share in his glory." Jesus, in a parable about the day we meet God face to face, says that He may say to us, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' Though we cannot comprehend these levels of eternal glory, according to Jesus, some will receive greater honour, authority, and joy. But already in this life we may start to receive reward and inheritance as we follow Jesus whole-heartedly.

What is our inheritance in this life? There are four aspects to it: There's **upward** inheritance—we may get to know God much better. God himself is our inheritance. "We are heirs of God," says Paul. He wants to bring us to the place where we can say, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Psalm 73:25-26).

There's **inward** inheritance—we may become more like Jesus. As we daily sow to please the Spirit, we progressively reap the transformed life from the Spirit (Galatians 6:8). There's **sideways** inheritance—we may enjoy God's people. Our brothers and sisters in Christ— "his holy people"—are not only God's inheritance. They are ours, too. There's **outward** inheritance—God has planned "good works in advance for [each of us] to do" (Ephesians 2:10).

I AM EMPOWERED

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Ephesians 3:20–21)

Next in Ephesians 1, Paul prays that, "the eyes of [our] heart may be enlightened in order that you may know … his incomparably great power for us who believe." (v19)

God's power is available to us. We are invited to draw on it for our lives and ministries.

As we survey Paul's benediction in Ephesians 3 (above) about God's immeasurable ability, we notice that Paul uses vivid language to emphasise the fact of His power in our mind. Strip the words down and notice that "God is able" is the basic idea. But notice, also, the words and phrases he adds:

God is not only able; He is able "now." God's power is not merely a past event that raised Jesus from the dead, or saved me out of darkness back in the day. Neither is it merely a future event when Jesus will return to renew the world. It is a present reality. Right this moment, we can expect to see God at work.

But what can His power achieve? God is able now to do what things we may reasonably "ask." But wait, Paul adds that God is able to now do "what we ask or imagine." We may think to ask God for something, but if we let our imagination run loose, we may ask Him for even more. But wait—it's not that God can do some of what we ask or imagine. Paul says He can do "all" we ask or imagine!

Is God limited by our imagination and requests? No, says, Paul—He can do "more than" all we ask or imagine. How much more? "Immeasurably more," says Paul as he creates a new word—*hyperekperissou*—as if to say, God's power is *supersoniccalifragilisticexpialidocious!* It's off the scale. God is a billion trillion zillion units of unimaginable, incomparable, incomprehensible omnipotence.

Amazingly, this power "is at work within us" as individual believers and as local churches. Perhaps Paul is just speaking about the first century church having access to this? No! Paul cannot be clearer—this power is available "throughout all generations" and "forever and ever."

What is this power available to do for us? First, God's power helps you to overcome Satan. Says Jesus, "I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you." (Luke 10:19)

Second, God's power helps you to outlast temptation. "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it." (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Third, God's power helps you in your weakness. Says Paul, "I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Corinthians 12:9–10).

Finally, God's power helps you to introduce others to Jesus. "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses … to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

I HAVE THE MIND OF CHRIST

We declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. ... it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived—these things God has prepared for those who love him"—for God has revealed them to us by his Spirit. ... We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. ... "Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.
(1 Corinthians 2:7–8, 12–13, 16)

It should blow the mind to think about our identity and inheritance in Christ. Unless, of course, we fail to perceive its truthfulness and wonder with the help of the Holy Spirit. We need more than dry knowledge of our Christ-bought identity. We need dynamic Spirit-given insight. That's why Paul in Ephesians 1 prays for us that our education about our new identity will become explosive: "I keep asking that ... [the] glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know. ... I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know ..." (v17, 19).

Let's unpack Paul's words above to the Corinthians: "We declare God's wisdom, a mystery ... destined for our glory before time began" (v7) God had always planned to redeem the world through the coming and crucifixion of His Son. This was His secret. But finally, for those who have believed the gospel, it is no longer a secret. We can know who Christ is, and who we are in Christ.

"What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived,' these things God has prepared for those who love him." Paul employs Isaiah's language to capture the marvels of our salvation-identity. *"We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God."* The spirit of the world, here, refers to the spiritual blindness that pervades a godless approach to life. On our own, we cannot perceive Christ and salvation. Natural capacity is not enough—we need God to disclose His wisdom to us directly by His Holy Spirit: *"For God has revealed them to us by his Spirit"* (v10). Apart from the Spirit's illuminating work in our hearts and minds, we just don't get it.

"That we may understand what God has freely given us." It is only by the Spirit that we can understand and experience the meaning of the universe, the blazing beauty of the Lord of glory, and our blood-bought gift of a new identity in Jesus. The preaching of the gospel and the teaching of passages like Ephesians 1 are crucial—they are *"spiritual realities in Spirit-taught words."* Study and explore God's Word in dependence on the Spirit—He is eager to open your eyes to the wonderful realities it describes.

By inspiring the Bible for all, the Spirit has removed the cover that had hidden the truth from all people. By illuminating the Scriptures to each of us personally He now removes the cover that still hides the truth from our minds. Much like a blind man, wrongly thinking that a diamond he's just picked up is a stone, so an unsaved person is unable to discern the value of the Gospel. However, *"the person with the Spirit"* (v15) not only can distinguish the diamond from a stone—their eyes light up to its unmatched beauty.

"Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" Great question—after all, God's knowledge is unfathomable. However, Paul makes the astonishing claim that the Spirit who indwells us also enables us to grasp "all that God has prepared for those who love him" and all that "'God has freely given us." Indeed, "we have the mind of Christ."

I AM DEAD TO SIN

We were therefore buried with him through baptism … For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. … Now if we died with Christ, we … will also live with him. … The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. … Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.
(Romans 6:4–5, 8, 10–11, 13)

Imagine a world, if you will, a little different from our own. In this world, divorce is not allowed. The only way out of a marriage is to die. Now picture a woman married to a tyrant who dominates her. There is no escape. She cannot sidestep any of his commands or demands.

But there's one other fascinating feature in this world. Resurrections are possible. So how does this victim get free from the abuse? She dies! Then she raises again. This time round she gets her "happily ever after"—she is swept off her feet by a wonderful, kind man whom she marries.

Then one day she's sitting at a restaurant and who approaches her but her previous husband. "Come home with me right away!" he barks. So familiar is his voice, so ingrained is her sense of obedience to him, that she starts to comply.

But then she realizes she doesn't need to. He becomes more insistent, so she pulls out her death certificate and shows him. "I think you may be confusing me with someone else." He is only half deterred and maintains that she is his, so she lifts up her hand and points to her ring finger. "I am married to someone else!" she declares.

Paul's favourite term in Ephesians 1 for a Christian person is that they are "in Christ." Six times (in verses 3, 4, 7, 9, 11, 13) the phrase "in Christ," or "in him" is used. This means we have been spiritually joined to Jesus by God. It also means—as Paul explains in Romans 6—that the major events of His life are true of us, too. Specifically, when He died on the cross, there we were—dying with Him. And when He rose from the dead, there we were—rising to life with Him. Water baptism is a picture of both of these aspects: it is at once our death certificate and our birth certificate.

So, how do you break free from sin? Paul gives us three steps:

First, count yourself dead to sin. Sin had a legal claim to you in the past, but now that you are in Christ, you are "married" to Another. Now—as Romans 5 clarifies—life, grace, power, and righteousness reign over you.
This is not a psychological process to undergo, but a spiritual reality to claim by faith. Paul does not mean here that you need to die to sin more and more. His point is that you have already died to sin. He is talking about a specific event that has already happened.

Second, refuse to offer any part of your life to sin. Defy sin's demand on your life. Whatever history you had with sin is just that—history! Familiar as it's marching orders may feel, hold up your death-to-sin certificate, and marriage-to-Christ ring.

Third, offer up every part of your life to righteousness. Jesus has, once and for all, freely offered up His life for you on the cross. So, this day and every day, offer up your life to Him. His bloodied body became an instrument of God's saving grace, now let your body become an instrument of God's empowering grace.

I AM ALIVE TO GOD

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ.
(Ephesians 2:4–6)

Next in Ephesians 1, Paul says that the power that is available to those of us in Christ is "the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead" (v19–20).

Paul surprises us. To describe God's power for us he does not refer to God's universe-creating power. Actually, there was a moment in history when God exerted even a greater power—in the resurrection of Jesus. Why is that? Creation is a triumph over nothingness and formlessness, while resurrection is a triumph over the death and destruction that sin plunged creation into.

To describe resurrection energy, Paul stacks word upon word in a short sentence: in rapid sequence, he says, "power … might … strength … exerted … raised." As the tomb opened and Jesus exited, an energy was released that sent shock waves of new creation across the universe—for this is a power that would eventually lead to the renewal of all creation, and the salvation of every person in Christ. On that first Easter morning, Jesus defeated not only His own death, but ours, too!

What does it mean to be in Christ? Yesterday we learned that when Jesus died, there we were, dying to sin with Him. But today we discover that when Jesus was raised, there we were, being raised to life with Him. Once we were dead in our sin, now we have been made alive with Christ.

What does it mean that we were dead in our sin? When a great branch falls from a tree, it still has life in it even though it has been cut from its source. It has a bleak future as the death inside eventually will become death outside. We struggle with the teaching that humans are "dead to God" and "dead in their sins" because people appear so very alive. The athlete's body is a wound-up spring of great energy and ability. The lover's affection will cross the oceans in pursuit of the beloved. The author's mind reaches the heights of brilliance. The artist's creation blows our hair back in wonder.

Our physicality, emotionality, rationality, creativity, and personality may be very alive with God-given life, yet the deepest part of us—the part that matters supremely—is dead. Within ourselves, within our own personal spiritual capacities, we are cut off from God, as unresponsive to His presence and voice as a corpse to a doctor. We are blind to Jesus' glory, deaf to the Spirit's voice. Our heart does not and cannot leap towards the Father with expecting, trusting delight.

Jesus alone can raise us from the dead. Until the Prince awakens us with His kiss of grace, we are amongst the living dead. As Jesus said, "no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again" (John 3:3).
When His dear friend Lazarus had already been four days in the tomb, Jesus proclaimed to the dead man's sister, Martha: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26).

He proved the truth of that claim shortly thereafter. He called out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth" What happened next? Well, Lazarus came forth! Why? Because the One who called is not merely the giver of life but Life itself! In the same way Jesus calls forth life in our inner being and we are made fully alive in Christ.

I AM SEATED WITH CHRIST

That power [for us who believe] is the same as the mighty strength [God] exerted when he … seated [Christ] at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that can be invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (Ephesians 1:19–23)

A farmer found an eagle's egg and put it in a nest of the barnyard hen. The eaglet hatched among a brood of chicks, and grew up with them. Thinking she was a hen, she scratched the earth for worms; clucked and cackled; and thrashed her wings to fly a few feet into the air. Years passed and the eagle grew very old. One day she saw above in the cloudless sky a magnificent bird, gliding with graceful majesty, with scarcely a beat of its golden wings. The old eagle looked up in awe and asked her neighbour what kind of bird that was. "That's the eagle, the king of the birds," came the reply. "It belongs to the sky. We belong to the earth." So, the eagle lived and died a chicken, for that's what she thought she was.

Too many are oblivious to who they are in Christ, therefore unable to become in their daily life who they already are in God's sight. Ephesians 1 tells us who we are, beckoning us to stretch out our wings and fly: As an image-bearer, I am a blessed and chosen saint. In the Beloved, I am loved, known and delighted in. By Christ's blood, I am redeemed and forgiven. Aware of God's purpose, I am destined, included, and for the praise of God's glory. Because of the Spirit, I am sealed, indwelt, a temple, guaranteed, and God's possession. I am a sister or brother to others, a child of God, and a child of light. As God's inheritance, I am a called and empowered heir. Having the mind of Christ, I know that I am dead to sin and alive to God.

Finally, Paul's description reaches its pinnacle in the last verses of Ephesians 1. God's power did not merely rescue Jesus from death. It exalted Him to the throne where He co-rules the universe with His Father. Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth. At most He tolerates for a short while all forms of political, ideological, demonic and personal resistance. But already now, these are His footstool.

Amazingly, we who are Christ's body share His power and authority! These dark powers are under Jesus' feet—but we are His feet! Jesus on earth ministered through His physical body, but now He ministers through His body, the church. The Message paraphrases these verses: "The church … is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence."

In the final three days of our adventure of Ephesians 1, we have asked what it means to be in Christ. Outside of us being joined by the Holy Spirit to Jesus, it also means that everything that has happened to Him has happened to us. Can you see Jesus dying? Well, there you were dying to sin with Him. Now watch Him rise. There you were coming alive to God with Him. Now see Him ascending to the highest heavens. There you were taking your place on the throne with Him—Paul makes this unmistakably clear in a few verses: "God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6). Other Scriptures make the same point: Says Jesus, "To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations." (Revelation 2:26). "If we endure, we will also reign with Christ" (2 Timothy 2:12). "The saints will rule the world" (1 Corinthians 6:2).

Lord Jesus Christ,

I'm sorry for doing things my own way.

I'm sorry for living a life away from You.

Please forgive my sin.

I acknowledge that You are the Son of God.

I acknowledge that You died on the cross for me.

Please adopt me into Your family.

I want to live as a child of God from today for the rest of

my life and be with You for all eternity.

Amen

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