

WEEK ONE



THE GOSPEL CHANGES EVERYTHING

SMALL GROUP CONTENT

- 1 — How was your overall experience at the Men's Conference?
- 2 — Why were you interested in going?
- 3 — What areas from the weekend stuck out to you the most?
- 4 — What was your main take away and action step?
- 5 — What are you interested in gaining from being in this 4 week group?
- 6 — How can we be praying for you this next month?

DIRECTIONS

- 1 — Each week you will read the text and explanation.
- 2 — Each week you come prepared to engage in conversation centered around the discussion questions.

AT HOME CONTENT

Background + Purpose

Have you ever heard a speech that moved you? One that comes to mind is Mel Gibson's character in Braveheart when he delivers that monologue about fighting for freedom. The odds are stacked against the Scots as they work towards independence from England. The Scots stand on the battle line, crippled by fear as they look across the field at the superior resources of their enemies. Gibson's character, William Wallace, recognizes the fear and doubt of those who are about to engage in war and begins reminding them of why they are there – they stand against tyranny. All men will die, but they have the opportunity to die for a purpose - freedom, a benefit they might never enjoy but one that their families and friends can. Wallace ends his speech with this,

“Run and you’ll live, at least a while. And dying in your beds many years from now, would you be willing to trade all the days from this day to that for one chance, just one chance to come back here and tell our enemies that they may take our lives, but they’ll never take our freedom!”

The whole crowd roars with an overwhelming sense of courage and belief, and those men go on to win the battle and push back the reign of tyranny a bit more.

It’s important to remember as we look at Ephesians three that Paul started this letter with a speech of his own. Ephesians 1:3-14 is one entire sentence in Greek, a monologue of sorts in which Paul reminds every person of the purpose of their existence, the freedom that comes in Christ, the identity we have received, the triumph of the cross, and the defeat of sin and death. Paul’s point is that the Gospel has changed everything, and for those who believe, they not only receive the benefits of being with God, they join a battle in which they, too, become agents which push back the reign of tyranny.

Paul has to remind his audience of the what and why of the Gospel because only then will each person lift their head and devote their life to a purpose outside of themselves. So, as we approach chapter three, Paul seeks to explain to people like us 1. Life Before the Gospel 2. The Arrival of The Gospel, and 3. The Grasping of the Gospel – only then can we move to chapters four through six and join the battle with courage and belief.

Life Before the Gospel

“For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” (Ephesians 3:1-6 ESV)

Explanation

As always, a little context will help us understand what the heck Paul is talking about. In chapter two, Paul explains that Jews and Gentiles were at odds with each other. They were two cultures that disagreed about everything. They had different values, worldviews, beliefs – it would be as polarized as Republicans and Democrats, Chiefs and Raider fans, farmers and CEOs – but Paul explains that something has come to pass to bring them into community with one another, where each party abandons some of their key characteristics because they've been given new values, worldviews, beliefs in Christ.

Now, Paul is speaking to the Gentiles, probably most of us reading this sentence, and he is explaining that at one time, you weren't a part of God, you didn't have Christ – what does this mean? It means there was a time in our life when the things we most loved were actually destroying us. There was a time in our life when what was most important (being better, smarter, richer, or more acclaimed than the guy next to us) was the cause of our despair and anxiety. So long as that was true, we were like dead men walking around waiting for time to rob us of everything we love. We were driven by appetite and passion, desire and emotion, and despite seeking after good things, we found only imitations.

What's worse is that we were stuck. Sin had enslaved those appetites and passions and left us guilty before the justice of a divine Judge – *this was our life before the Gospel*, but now Paul has revealed to us what was once unknown, even to those who claimed God as their own, that we Gentiles had a place in Israel, in the people of God. This place wasn't through making sacrifices for sin; it was accepting the One whose life became a sacrifice; it wasn't through going to the temple to be with God; it was allowing God to make us a temple so he could be with us, it wasn't to remain as we were – dead men walking around until time robbed us of all we love, it was to live as resurrection people destined for eternal life with the One we love the most – Jesus. Life before the Gospel was filled with isolation, competition, death – Life in the Gospel is filled with Christ, where we are “fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1 — What was life like before you trusted the Gospel?
- 2 — If you were to ask your wife, kids, or friends what they thought you considered to be most important – what would they say?
- 3 — Pray that God would reveal the areas of life that keep you from enjoying the full benefits of being “fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ.”

WEEK TWO



LIFE BEFORE THE GOSPEL

SMALL GROUP CONTENT

Small Talk — What is the most inspiring speech you have ever heard?

Good Talk — What should life look like if the Gospel is the guiding principle of your life?

Real Talk — If you had to rate how much the Gospel has changed your life on a scale from 0-5 (0 being not at all, 5 being totally), what would you rate it and why?

— Share responses to any of the reflection questions from the past week's reading:

1 — What was life like before you trusted the Gospel?

2 — If you were to ask your wife, kids, or friends what they thought you considered to be most important – what would they say?

AT HOME CONTENT

The Arrival of the Gospel

“Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.” (Ephesians 3:7-13 ESV)

Explanation

There is a social theory called “six degrees of separation.” You’ve probably heard of this before; some people even make it a game. It’s the idea that if you name any person, there are only six degrees of separation between you and them. For instance, if I named someone famous like Patrick Mahomes, this social theory says that you will know someone (1), who knows someone (2), who knows someone (3), who knows someone (4), who knows someone (5), who knows someone (6) that knows Patrick Mahomes. The point of the theory is that we are more connected, even to the rich and famous than we realize.

Now, I’m sure this theory has truth to it, I’m sure I could think of people who have these connections, but I’m not one of them. I don’t know anyone famous. I didn’t go to high school with a movie star or rub shoulders with a politician. If people are connected to the rich and famous, it ain’t through me! But the point of the theory is that we know someone who does. We know someone who isn’t too far removed and could introduce us. Paul is explaining that for Gentiles – he is that person.

Paul believed he had been called by God to introduce Gentiles to Jesus. Paul himself was Jewish, and generally speaking, the promises that God gave were to the Jewish people, but Paul says this is part of the great mystery now revealed, that God has invited Gentiles into the Jewish story and that the story is changing in wonderful ways. Instead of Israel being made up of ethnically Jewish people, it is now made up of Jesus people from all walks of life. Together, they constitute the church, the people of God, who demonstrate to the world what it looks like to be changed by the Gospel. Paul says this was God’s plan from the very beginning, but now it’s being seen in full color. It’s being seen in the world, but also from the heavenly places. Angels and demons are hearing the same sorts of news, and it’s causing a stir. The Gospel has provided a covering for sin, a solution to death, and space for fellowship with God. Paul says that the Gospel means you can have the confidence to address God and know that He hears you, that you have access to him like a child to a father. *Now that the Gospel has arrived, everything is changing.*

This is why Paul can say, “don’t lose heart over my suffering.” He’s saying, don’t be sad about my circumstances because it’s for you. In other words, *the arrival of the Gospel doesn’t just mean the cross can be used for good but that every suffering is used for God’s glory and good.* Without knowing Paul’s story, we may miss how staggering this change is. Paul was a persecutor of Jews who became Christians (Acts 9).

Paul was a passionate religious person who obeyed the rules of Judaism – especially associating with Gentiles. *But the arrival of the Gospel in Paul's life changed him from being violent to being a sufferer, from being a persecuting racist to an evangelistic servant of all.* The arrival of the Gospel means access to God and each other without any degree of separation.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1 — What is a difficult situation in your life that you have seen be used for good?
- 2 — Who was the person who introduced you to the Gospel? Write them a letter of thanks.
- 3 — Who are people you know who need the Gospel? Pray that God would use you to share the light of the Gospel with them and others.

WEEK THREE



THE ARRIVAL OF THE GOSPEL

SMALL GROUP CONTENT

Small Talk — Who is the most famous person you have met? What happened?

Good Talk — What sorts of things should the church do to communicate the wisdom of God?

Real Talk — In what ways can you edify the church to realize its mission and help the world realize its invitation?

— Share responses to any of the reflection questions from the past week's reading:

- 1 — What is a difficult situation in your life that you have seen be used for good?
- 2 — Who was the person who introduced you to the Gospel?
- 3 — Who are people you know who need the Gospel?

AT HOME CONTENT

The Grasping of the Gospel

“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

(Ephesians 3:14-20 ESV)

Explanation

Have you ever had a moment when you become extra aware of blessing? It could be the birth of a child, grandchild, wedding, promotion, or even your conversion to following Jesus. It's like, you step back mentally and view things from 30,000 feet, and a sense of wonder and gratitude comes over you. You consider how you could be this blessed, why God would let someone like you have something like this.

I think this is the picture we get here as Paul reflects on what the Gospel has accomplished. He is writing a letter to people who are not like him at all but have been changed. He grasps at this moment the immense beauty of the fact that dead people have been made alive, that Jews and Gentiles are now a part of the same family. The Gospel has made it so that Paul himself loves and is suffering for people he once despised, and now he explains that he is on his knees, speaking to God on their behalf. He wants them to continue to see what he sees, to be changed in the same ways he is – do you realize that includes you? It is only in grasping the Gospel, the great love of God displayed through Christ's death and resurrection, that we can become like Paul, where suffering can be turned into glory. More importantly, it is only in grasping the Gospel that we can become like Christ, where death can be turned into resurrection.

The Gospel is never too familiar, never too dull. We never graduate from the Gospel toward deeper and more profound mystery – instead, we grow in grasping. We move from knowing the Gospel to experiencing it; the difference between knowing honey is sweet, to tasting it. Where love becomes so enjoyed and wonderful that it becomes not only all we desire but all we can give. Paul celebrates the amazing change he has seen because of so many who have grasped the Gospel, but he also falls on his knees because he knows there is still more to enjoy and more to be changed, and he ends in praise, “Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

We hope this study has been fruitful in this grasping of the Gospel. We join with Paul's prayer that you would continue to grasp God's love, and we look expectantly to what all he will produce.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1 — What is a time when you experienced that sense of wonder and gratitude?
- 2 — How do you open up your life to people who may be different but are a part of the family of God?
If you don't do this well, how can you?
- 3 — Pray that God would fill you with his Spirit so that you “may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

WEEK FOUR



THE GRASPING OF THE GOSPEL

SMALL GROUP CONTENT

Small Talk — What was a time you experienced a sense of wonder or gratitude?

Good Talk — What does it mean to be “rooted and grounded in love” (v. 17)?

Real Talk — What have been times when the Gospel has lost its sense of wonder in your life?
Why do you think that was? What is Paul’s solution?

— Share responses to any of the reflection questions from the past week’s reading:

How do you open up your life to people who may be different but are a part of the family of God? If you don’t do this well, how can you?