



CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: Ephesians

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Chosen

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It is that time of year where we want to encourage you, now that the fall is facing us, to consider getting involved in your church beyond Sunday morning in a small group. Over 2,000 people at Canyon Hills are already in small groups, and that's exciting, but that means there are at least 1,000 of you who still haven't found your way into a Life Group. This is the time to start checking that out. There's all kinds of information in your bulletin, as well as in the lobby, so please start that journey.

Before I jump in, I just want to ask, how many of you in this room are Life Group leaders in any age? From our grade school Life Groups all the way to Senior Saints, you're involved in leading or facilitating a Life Group. Hold your hands up; let me see them all over this room. Thank you so much for what you're doing in the ministry and the life of this church. I want to remind you that this coming Sunday is your huddle for all the leaders as you get ready to launch into the fall. I want to encourage you to make sure that is on your calendar for next week.

Let's get our Bibles open to Ephesians, chapter 1. I realize some of you were gone last weekend with the holiday and everything and you missed a very important introduction to the book of Ephesians. I can't encourage you enough to take the time to go back and listen to that introduction. It's going to really set the table for what you can expect as we enter into a Sunday morning verse-by-verse study through what some have called the Grand Canyon of Scripture, the breathtakingly beautiful and inexhaustible book we know as *Ephesians*.

A very (and I mean *very*) brief recap would be to remember that Ephesians is written by the apostle Paul to believers who are struggling to live out their faith in Jesus in the highly-educated, very wealthy, sexually-saturated, trendy, and godless city of Ephesus. It's really hard to follow Jesus when everything in the culture is antagonizing and rejecting all the things following Jesus is about.

Certainly, just that statement alone should perk your ears up to see the relevance of this book we are now entering into. We certainly can understand that truth. It's hard to follow Jesus when you live in a culture that is especially antagonizing toward him.

You see, for the Ephesians, their Christianity was being reduced down to just trying to fit in, trying to blend in with the culture so they wouldn't make any waves and draw attention to themselves. For these precious saints to whom Paul is writing, as well as many today who follow Jesus, compromising was seeming like the only source of peace. Knowing the context of the lives of those to whom Paul is writing, it makes the words of this letter a bit shocking because of where the content of the letter goes, and even more so, because of where the letter begins.

Paul does something that shows, I think, incredible pastoral wisdom. He knows when Christians struggle we sometimes forget, don't we? Sometimes, in our pain, fears, discouragements, disappointments, or just the anxieties of life, those things get so large that we can forget who we are. Paul Tripp calls this *identity amnesia*, what can happen to us when we're in the midst of so much instability in our world.

Instead of turning us directly to all of our struggles and trying to fix them, Paul writes this letter, and he's going to point us to what ultimately provides the stability and the peace for which we long when things around us are becoming more and more unstable. He's going to lovingly and firmly give us a vision for something far greater than our struggles themselves. What we have in Ephesians are really marching orders from Paul, but they're not what you think they're going to be.

With that said, let's go ahead and stand for the reading of God's Word as we always do. Out of just sheer respect, awe, and expectation that when we read God's Word, it is God speaking to us, we stand. I'm going to go back to verses 1 and 2, because that's all we got to last Sunday, and then we'll jump into some more verses here.

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved."

Father, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ that you would take our hearts and our minds into these heavenly places about which Paul is writing. God, I pray you would take us there with any of the struggles, disappointments, fears, anxieties, discouragement, anger, helplessness, or hopelessness. God, whatever we bring with us, would you, in these few minutes, lift us up and show us what Paul is wanting us to see? In Christ's name we ask, amen.

Notice, knowing the context I explained to you, Paul does not begin with sympathy. He starts with blessings. It's as if Paul is starting out by writing, "Hey, I heard it's getting harder to follow

Jesus over there in Ephesus. Let me tell you how excited I am about being a Christian." It's not exactly where you'd think he would start this letter, knowing what we know. He gets a report back from Ephesus. He has been there several times. He helped start the church in Ephesus, but he's away now. He's in prison in Rome.

He says, "I hear it's getting a little tough on you guys. Let me tell you how blessed I am to be a Christian." That's kind of a little surprise, and he starts by telling them... This is how his encouragement starts. This is how his counseling starts. This is his approach to the whole truth about how hard it's getting to be a Christian in our world. He says, "Hey, I want you to remember..."

1. *We are chosen by God.* This is where Paul starts. The God of the universe chose us. Now, let's be sure this isn't just some random thought that popped into Paul's mind when he wrote this letter. In James, chapter 2, James writes, "God has chosen us to be heirs of his kingdom." In 1 Peter, chapter 2, the apostle Peter wrote, "We are chosen people for God's own possession."

Paul brings this idea up again in 1 Corinthians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, and Colossians. Jesus talks about us being chosen by God in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. In fact, in Matthew 22, Jesus says those startling words, "**For many are called, but few are chosen.**" This indicates that not all are chosen, because if everyone were chosen then there is no choosing going on at all, right?

Notice Paul takes us a little higher into the heavenlies here and says believers have not only been chosen, but... Look what it says here in verse 4. "**...he chose us in him before the foundation of the world...**" Some of your Bibles might say "before time eternal." Paul is saying there is nothing random or reactionary about your salvation and where God has chosen for you to live out your faith. Paul says the same exact thing in Romans, chapter 1, and Romans 16. He says it again in 2 Timothy 1 and Titus 1.

The exact time and place of our salvation was determined by God. This shouldn't surprise us totally, because it all goes back to Psalm 139. That's one of our favorite psalms. Many of you remember this psalm. You know this psalm. You love this psalm. It's one of our favorites. It speaks to our very existence, our birth, being the result of God's sovereign, choosing grace.

In fact, let's go there. Put a little spot there in Ephesians 1. We're going to get right back to it. Look at Psalm 139, and let's remember what we already know to be true about God and us. I would bet, if this is the Bible you usually read or bring to church, a lot of verses in this chapter are going to be underlined. Look at verses 13-16 with me. The psalmist is writing,

"For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them."

Just try to wrap your head around that. The psalmist is saying, "You know what I know, God? You saw me before I was born and you wrote down, before time began, not only when and where I would be born, but exactly how many days I would live." We love that. We embrace a God who knows us and loves us that much.

Back to Ephesians 1. Paul lists this very thing, the very first spiritual blessing for us to focus on in our times of struggle. He's saying, "You were chosen to live and to be saved for this exact time and place. There's no accident about you being alive now and being a Christian right now. It's not about unfortunate timing that you live in this difficult place in which to follow Jesus."

Paul is writing this, and he's blown away. He's saying, "You were chosen in Christ. You were chosen to be saved. You were chosen to be redeemed in Christ before the foundation of time." He's blown away by this, and he should be, and so should we. Think about this. God chose us to be saved by his Son's death and resurrection before he created the earth and before he even created this thing called time. That's pretty mind-blowing.

Yet again, it shouldn't be totally surprising, because God has always been the chooser, right? All throughout history, we see God making the choices. We see God choosing Abraham to be the father of the nation of God's people. Abraham had no clue. He had no idea.

It wasn't like there was a posting on Instagram, "Job opening: I need someone to begin a nation for me. –God. Apply within." No, God showed up and said, "Abram, I'm God. You don't know me, but you're going to get to know me. You and Sarai are going to start a nation of people through which I'm going to bring the world's Messiah."

He chose Jacob over Esau, the older brother. He chose Joseph, the youngest of 12 brothers, to save his people from starvation. He chose Moses to save his people from slavery. He chose the tribe of Judah, the smallest tribe out of 12 tribes of Israel, to bring forth the Messiah. He chose John the Baptist to announce the arrival of Jesus. He chose the little town of Bethlehem to be the birthplace. He chose this unimpressive place called Nazareth to be his hometown. He chose the 12 disciples. He chose Paul, this diehard Jew, to take the gospel to the Gentiles.

God chooses. Guess what! If you're a believer this morning, he chose you. It doesn't make sense. What did we do to deserve it? Nothing, because he chose us before we were even conceived. Paul is saying when life around us is unstable, start with remembering whose you are, not who you are. That's where it begins. That's where the blessing begins. That's where he focuses. Next, Paul reveals God's purpose in choosing his children.

2. *We are chosen by God to be holy and blameless.* Verse 4, "**...holy and blameless...**" The implication is when God chose us, when we were chosen to be his children, when we were chosen to be saved, we weren't holy; we were sinful. We weren't blameless; we were guilty and condemned. We are all born with our very first parents' spiritual DNA.

If you've been around this church for any amount of time, you know what I'm talking about. Due to Adam and Eve's sin and rebellion, the entire human race inherited the terminal disease of

death, so when we're all born, when every human being is born, we are actually born spiritually dead first, meaning we are separated from the one true righteous God because of the sinful hearts with which we are born, which we inherited from Adam and Eve.

We're not only born spiritually dead, separated from God. We're also born physically dead, meaning our earthly bodies start the dying process the second we're born. Isn't that true? The second we're born, we start dying. Isn't that why you came to church today, to be encouraged by that wonderful reminder? You're going to be at lunch today at Applebee's and the waitress is going to ask you, "What did your preacher say?" You're going to say, "He told us we're dying. We're all dying. Death and destruction everywhere."

Well, Scripture tells us that the spiritual and physical death are the just and deserved consequences of rebelling against God. Here's the scary part. We have no control and no power over death, so why does God choose us to be holy and blameless? Why is this his divine purpose? Hebrews 12 helps us understand that a little bit when Hebrews says without holiness it's impossible to see God. God wants us to see him again. He wants to restore the fellowship sin destroyed.

First Peter 1 tells us God wants us to share in his holiness. God wants to restore the innocence that sin destroyed. You see, before Adam and Eve sinned, there was perfect access in the presence of God. Before Adam and Eve sinned, they were completely shameless, pure, and innocent. God has chosen us to restore that. You see, without our sins forgiven and removed, we cannot come near him. In fact, God told Moses, "No man can look at me and live" (Exodus 33).

His high and sovereign purpose in choosing us to be saved by the atoning sacrifice of his Son is to restore what sin destroyed. When he chooses us and saves us, we now are spiritually alive. We can come to God and know him personally. We are now made physically alive because the inheritance of our salvation in being chosen is eternal life, which Jesus provides through his resurrection and him conquering death.

We are chosen by God to be holy and blameless. That's his purpose. In verse 5, Paul is going to reveal God's motive. If you look at verse 5... In fact, in my Bible, two words before verse 5 begins, it says, "**In love he predestined us...**"

3. *We are chosen by God because he loves us.* When Paul says God has predestined us, and then he repeats this again in verse 11... We're going to come full circle to this idea of predestination in two Sundays. You don't want to miss that Sunday; trust me. When he brings up predestination here, he's synonymously continuing the idea or meaning of being chosen, only now he's taking us a little higher into heaven with this blessing.

You see, when he writes this word, *predestined us*, that verb in the Greek... Basically, he's saying here that this predestining that God has done is a one-time action performed in the past. He has done it and it is finished. He's not predestining anyone anymore. He has predestined everybody he's ever going to predestine for the history of the world. That's what he's saying. He has predestined us.

Now, when you see this word, I want to wrap your arms around it a little bit more. In the word *predestination*, you see two different words. The word *pre-*, which means before, and then the word *destiny* is in there somewhere. That word actually is referring to boundary or limit. *Predestination* is to mark out the boundary or limits of a place, thing, or person in advance. That's what this means.

James Montgomery Boice, one of my favorite preachers of old, describes it this way. He says something like, "The chosen-out once have had boundaries or limitations put around them by God which bring them within the sphere of a certain future or destiny." In other words, God did not choose us or predestine us after we chose to believe in Jesus.

God's choosing and predestination of those he is saving is not something that is predicated by us doing the right thing first. In other words, all the choosing and predetermined eternal destinies of his children have been sovereignly determined by God before time began. In other words, he left nothing about your salvation or my salvation to chance or choice.

This is where I wanted to get to in this point. Notice Paul says the motivation for God doing that predestining is nothing less than his absolute love for those he has chosen. Look at right before verse 5. "**In love he predestined us...**" That word *love* there is *agape*. It's the word for unconditional love. The whole idea of us being predestined to be blameless and holy in Jesus is completely wrapped in, saturated with, and immersed under God's unconditional, self-sacrificing love. He lovingly and mercifully placed no conditions on us to be chosen by him.

These are the implications. Our salvation begins with God, not us. The implication is we love him because he first loved us. That's where Paul is taking them in this doctrine of predestination. There is the evidence of his love.

As Paul takes us into the heavenlies to focus on these blessings, he wants us to be sure that our predestination is an act of God's unconditional, self-sacrificing love. Therefore, it becomes impossible for us to accuse God of being unfair. "**In love...**" not, "In unfairness..."

You get the sense that when Paul is writing this, he's smiling with unconditional joy. Remember where he's writing from: prison. I picture Paul just writing this as fast as he can, just smiling with uncontrollable joy. He's raptured by these truths that form our reality and have the power to lift us up out of our struggles and our suffering.

I sense him being chained to the wall with just enough chain to write on the scroll or parchment, whatever he's writing on, and he's just writing it as fast as he can, saying, "Listen to this, you guys! Don't forget this!" He's in prison, chained to a wall. Wow! We're chosen by God because he loves us.

4. *God has chosen us to be adopted as his children.* I suppose you who have been adopted or have adopted a child feel the significance of this blessing more than most. In verses 4-5, it says, "**In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ...**"

When you think about it, all through life, we all experience being chosen. We know what it means to be chosen by someone or to be picked by others. When we were in grade school, we got picked to be on the kickball team at recess. Some of us have been chosen to be the lead in the school play, or you were chosen amongst all the applicants for the job you have.

Some of us were chosen to go to the prom or you were chosen by that college for the scholarship. You were chosen by that man or woman to be married. You were chosen by the IRS for an audit. You know what it means to be chosen. I know what that means. All through life, we know what it feels like to be chosen, to be picked.

Yet all of this being chosen is because we earned it, deserved it, or we wanted it. We pursued it. Yet Paul is saying being chosen by God is more like adoption. It's 100 percent up to the one doing the adopting. You never hear of adoption agencies where they call in orphans and say, "Okay, we want you to pick your parents. Here's a whole book of them. Pick which ones you want." Then they call you and say, "You've been picked to be a parent of this child!" No.

God has chosen us. He has adopted us to have the same full privileges and inheritance as Jesus. We are coheirs with Jesus of every single blessing Jesus has as the Son of God. As God's sons and daughters, we have a full-access pass to God in Christ. In fact, in chapter 2, Paul is going to unpack that.

He's going to take us even higher into the heavenlies and he's going to tell us that as chosen, adopted sons and daughters of God, we are already seated with Jesus in the heavenly places. We are already brought near to God by his blood. We are already citizens, members of God's household. All of that is already ours, even though it hasn't happened yet. All the inheritance and privileges of being a child of God are ours.

According to Ephesians 1:5, this is the unstoppable purpose of his will. He was not going to leave his purposes for your life and eternal destiny to the will and desires of your sinful heart. So, we see his purpose in choosing us is to make us holy and blameless. We see his motive in choosing us is unconditional, self-sacrificing love. We see his will and desire in adopting us is to give us the full inheritance and privileges of his children. Now, what does God want all of that to produce in this crazy world we're trying to live in as God's children?

5. *We are chosen by God for the praise of his glorious grace.* In verse 3, Paul starts the letter off by saying he "**...has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing...**" In verses 4 and 5, he starts to unpack those blessings. We are chosen, we are predestined, and we are adopted. Now, in verse 6, he's saying he has blessed us (He is making us happy. That's what it means when God is blessing us.) for his glory and praise.

Look at verse 6. "**...to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.**" He has done all this so that as we live in Christ in this sin-broken world, we will not look inward for our own coping skills. We're not going to look outward, trying to see how we can make this crazy, broken world less godless.

No, Paul is saying, "I want you to look upward and I want you to see the light of your true happiness. The source of your true happiness is God himself, and he will get the praise and the glory. In fact, he's so excited about this result that God wants to produce in us as we live as his children in this crazy world.

Look at verse 11. He's talking about predestination again, according to his purpose. Then, in verse 12, he says, "**...so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.**" Then, you look at verse 14: "**...who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.**"

You get the sense that Paul is saying, "Keep looking up! This is what God wants the whole world to see. This is what the world desperately needs a vision for, the glory of God. They're going to see the glory of God as you never forget whose you are. As his praise is always on your lips, that's where the glory of God shows up."

So, when we're struggling, suffering, anxious, fearful, discouraged, or uncertain, Paul points us to the heavenlies. He lifts us up and he calls us to the action of dwelling on and praising God for the spiritual blessings which are ours by the sheer grace and gift of his undeserving love. These blessings are better than any medication the world can prescribe. These blessings not only can, but must move us to get out of bed every single day and trust our God for the strength, patience, and love to live that day without compromise, and his praise is on our lips.

Now, this may or may not change your spouse. This may not change your work situation. Living like this may not change your parents or your child. This may not change your finances. It may not even change your health. Paul never alludes to any of that. No, what Paul is saying is that this can radically change *us*. Knowing whose we are, that God thought of us and had mercy and grace on us before time began to choose us, predestine us, and adopt us as his own... That's what changes us.

Then, when we get to chapters 4-6, he's going to describe and lay out how this actually affects every other aspect of our lives: our home life, our work life, our school life, our church life, our relationships, our sexuality... He's going to lay out, "If you understand whose you are, here's how you can live out your Christian life in this crazy, sin-broken nutcase of a world we're going to face tomorrow. He's calling us up to the heights of God's securest blessings found in Jesus because he knows this is where true comfort and strength come from.

Now, he has only touched on three or four of those blessings. There are several more coming as we work our way deeper into chapter 1. It's amazing. I can't wait to get to heaven and ask Paul, "What was it like writing this letter when you were in prison? You were chained in a dungeon and I got the sense, Paul, that you were just smiling, saying, 'Man, check this out! Don't forget! Here's who you are! Here's whose you are!'" I'm just going to ask him, "Were you excited to write that letter?" because nowhere in the letter does he ever talk about how crappy the world is in which the Ephesians were living.

I think the most appropriate thing for us to do is just to close our eyes for a moment and just thank God. If you are a believer, a follower of Jesus, I'm just going to ask you to take a minute, in your own words, you and God, and just thank him for choosing you before time began. Just thank him that he has adopted you into his family. All of that took place before you were worthy, before you were even born. Thank him for that.

O dear gracious heavenly Father, we bow our heads and admit that some of these doctrinal truths, these blessings that are so true, are sometimes hard to wrap our heads around. We praise you that you don't require us to understand it perfectly, but we do pray, God, that you would help us embrace it, believe it, and know the implications of your sacrificing love, your choosing love for us every day.

God, I pray that your praise would be on our hearts and our lips and that the whole world would see your glory. O God, may we be a church filled with people who are praising you in the midst of the struggles. God, continue to teach us. Help us to see how all of this will ultimately translate into living every day with great joy, power, and influence, not in the absence of pain and struggle, but even in the midst of it. We love you and we trust you. In Christ's name, amen.

Some of you are sitting here right now and you're scratching your heads, saying, "I'm not sure what that was all about, but I do know I don't have a relationship with God that's personal like that." If you were honest, you would say, "I've thought about this. I've heard about this. I've kind of stayed away from it." Yet all of a sudden, you find your heart and your mind open to wanting to know who this God is and why he has sent Jesus to die on the cross.

If that's where you're sensing that your heart and your head are right now, that's a gift from God. He is making you aware, by being here this morning, that he has done everything necessary for you to come to him. That's his invitation. The people standing up here right now would love to share with you how to take that step of faith, believing this God had you in mind when he sent Jesus to die.

So, if you want to ask someone, "Hey, what do I do? Where do I begin?" that's why they're here. I hope you'll come and talk to them before you walk out of this room today and start that journey. For the rest of us, bring your Bibles. We'll be in verse 7 next Sunday. See you then!