

Chosen & Called

AN EPHESIANS STUDY



beacon

Study 1: Who wrote the letter? (Eph. 1:1)

Intro: We're going to read in a book called Ephesians. This book is just one book in the Bible and was actually originally written as a letter to a church in the city of Ephesus. Whether you've read the Bible many times or this is your first time, I think there will be something for us to take away from this study together.

The main ideas behind this book are to help us to understand who God says we are (our identity) and how that should affect the way we live (our purpose). Who are you in God's eyes? And why are you here? These are two questions that we can ask ourselves no matter what we believe about God.

Read Ephesians 1:1a

The first line tells us who the author of this letter was.

Ask: Take a look. Who does it say wrote this letter?

Paul

Let's see what we can learn about Paul.

- Paul is mentioned in the Bible many times and we know that he wrote a lot of the New Testament (the 2nd half of the Bible).
- In Acts 13, we're told Paul was also called Saul. Saul was his Jewish name and Paul was his Romanised name. This was common for people having dual citizenship. (When I lived in China many of my Chinese friends took English names as they were easier for English speaking people to pronounce. This was kind of the idea for Paul.)

Read Acts 7:57-58

Ask: What's happening here?

There's a man (called Stephen) being stoned for being a Christian. He's being murdered. Saul (Paul) is there watching it all happen.

Ask: What does it say Saul is doing? What do you think it means?
Saul is just watching, but it says that people lay their coats at his feet. Basically, he's holding their stuff because they all know he's going to stay and watch the whole thing.

Ask: What does this tell us about the kind of person Paul was?
He watched people murder someone because they didn't share his faith, so he really wasn't a nice guy.

Read Acts 9:1-19

Ask: What's happening here?
Saul is traveling to the city of Damascus where he intends to do more harm to people when he's blinded by a light. He hears Jesus speaking to him and has a dramatic conversion experience. He literally becomes a Christian on the spot. It's a bit hard to believe - even for Ananias who points out to God that Saul is a scary person. But when Ananias goes to pray for Saul he can see that he really has changed.

Read Philippians 3:4-7

- Paul gives this list of reasons for why he's confident in himself. All of the things on this list would have been things that made him a good Jew and an outstanding Roman citizen. It's basically a list of all his accomplishments, proving he's the best of the best.

Ask: Look at sentence 7. What does he say about this list of things now that he's found Jesus?

He says he considers them a loss. The word "loss" there is literally rubbish, the dirtiest form of rubbish. Basically, anything good he could ever do himself is worthless without Jesus.

So why does all this matter to us?

- What we've learned is that Paul was a guy who's made a lot of really bad mistakes and done some pretty dark things.

- We've also learned that in other areas of his life, Paul is considered a really good person. (I know that's hard to imagine how he could be both - but aren't we all a bit of both?)
- And so Paul - this person who knows what it feels like to be really bad and really good - is sitting down to write a letter to help us to understand what God sees when he looks at us. Paul would know how scary it can feel to have done wrong and to wonder what God might think. And he also knows how it can feel to think you're good enough and realise that no one is ever good enough just on their own without God.

Ask: What does this make you think about what Paul has to say? Do you think this gives him some credibility to really be able to understand how we might feel?

Homework: Go through the first three chapters in Ephesians and underline anywhere that it says "in him" or "in Christ."

Study 2: Who was the letter written to? (Eph. 1:1)

Intro: Let's begin with a little reminder of what we talked about in the first week.

Who can remember the book of the Bible we are studying?

Who can remember what type of writing this was (ie, a book, a leaflet, a letter, etc)?

Who can remember what the 2 main themes are in this book (or the 2 main questions we will study)? *Who are you? (Identity) Why are you here? (Purpose)*

Who can remember who wrote this letter?

What is something you remember about Paul?

We ended last time with homework to go through the first three chapters and underline anywhere it says "in him" or "in Christ". Identify a few examples (Eph. 1:1, 4, etc).

Ask: Why do you think it might be important that there are so many places in the letter where Paul uses those phrases "in him" or "in Christ"? What's the point you think he might be trying to make? *Ephesians is filled with promises from God about who we are and what God will do for us. But Paul repeats those phrases over and over as a reminder that these promises are ONLY true for those who believe in Jesus - those who are "in Christ". For someone who is not yet a Christian, this shows you who you could be or what God wants to do for you if/when you choose to put your faith in him.*

Ask: Who does Paul say his letter is written to in sentence 1?

God's holy people

- In some translations instead of "holy people" they use the word "saint".

Ask: What comes to mind when you hear words like "saint or holy people"? What does that make you think?

- In the Bible anytime you see the word “saint” it means pretty much the same idea as “holy people”. The word “holy” actually means set apart or separate. Another way to understand the phrase “holy people” is they are God’s special ones. God says that people who believe in Jesus as their Saviour are holy - they are set apart by God. Not because they are really good or never make mistakes. Not because they’re better than anyone else. But because God has chosen them and loves them.
- Ultimately, God isn’t just using this idea of being holy to say that we’re special, but to remind us that he wants us to be different. To live differently than others.
- One dramatic example of this is the number of hospitals started by Christians and care for the sick provided by Christians over thousands of years. In ancient Rome, around AD360, the first civilian hospital was formed. This was in response to a terrible plague. One historian who wrote about the plague said that while everyone was fleeing the city of Caesarea the Christians were the only group staying behind to care for the sick. This is what he wrote:

All day long some of them [the Christians] tended to the dying and to their burial, countless numbers with no one to care for them. Others gathered together from all parts of the city a multitude of those withered from famine and distributed bread to them all.

Eusebius goes on to state that because of their compassion in the midst of the plague, the Christians’ “deeds were on everyone’s lips, and they glorified the God of the Christians. Such actions convinced them that they alone were pious and truly reverent to God.”

Ask: What are other ways Christians could be “holy” - or live differently - even in small ways?

- You’ll remember we said that one of the questions we’ll answer is who are you? We’ll learn together what God says our identity is if

we're in him. The first thing he tells us is - You are a saint OR You're holy!

Ask: We know that the letter is written to God's holy people. But Paul is even more specific about who it's written to. Can you see specifically which group of people this letter is written to in sentence 1? *God's holy people in Ephesus*

Ask: Why would a letter written to someone else be something we would want to read? Why would we think it has any meaning for us? How can we think these promises could possibly be for us and not ONLY for those Christians living in Ephesus a long time ago?

- Written material back then isn't like today. Everyone couldn't get a copy of a book or some important teaching. So when Paul wrote his letters to a church it was read out to the whole church and then was shared with other churches as well. The idea being that what he said was meant for ALL people who called themselves Christians not just this one group of people. (See Col. 4:16 for an example of this.)

Ask: There's one more thing we can learn about who this letter was written to. Look one last time at sentence 1. Can you see another word used to describe the kind of people they are? *Faithful*

Ask: What would you say it means to be faithful?

- No matter how we explain what it means to be faithful there's no way for anyone to really be faithful without demonstrating it through actions over time. It's not enough to just say it.
- For those who are Christians, God asks us to be faithful. It's a relationship and like all relationships God wants us to be faithful to him just like he's faithful to us. In fact, God's love for us is so strong he's faithful even when we aren't.
- For us to be faithful to God then, it requires that we give some amount of time to God over a period of time.

Ask: What do you think it would look like for you to be faithful to God over the next week or 2 weeks or even a month?

Homework: Read through the whole of Ephesians 3 times before we meet next. You might want to highlight sections that you find encouraging or make note of sections that you don't understand or have a question about. As we continue through, when we come to the bit you had a question about you can see if we answer the question in our discussion. If not, then you'll be able to ask your question and we can try to work it out together.

Study 3: Our Identity: Grace & Peace (Eph. 1:2)

Intro: You might remember that our homework was to read through all of Ephesians. Hopefully, you've had an opportunity to do that. If not, I'd really encourage you to give Ephesians a read through. If you don't have a Bible you can download the Bible app and can read it there or even listen to it.

If you've had a chance to read it, what is one thing that stood out to you? Was there something encouraging? Was there something particularly challenging or confusing?

Just as a quick review:

Who can remember who wrote the letter of Ephesians?

Who was the letter written to?

Read: Ephesians 1:2

- We've said that we'll answer two questions as we read Ephesians together. We'll answer: Who am I (Identity)? And why am I here (purpose)? Today we'll begin answering that first question - Who am I or what's my identity? We'll spend a few weeks answering this question together.

Ask: What do you think it means to have an identity? What is an identity?

Your identity can be seen as the way you define yourself. It's the collection of things that make up what we believe is true about us. We often feel our identity is the thing that gives us worth (or perhaps makes us feel that we do not have a worth).

Clearly, identity and what we believe about ourselves is an important thing to know and understand. Paul, tells us in Ephesians that those who trust in Jesus are given an identity in him (we talked about that last time).

This identity comes from what is true about us because we trust in Jesus and also what is given to us by God.

Ask: In the verse we just read, what are the two things given to us by God that are a part of our identity when we trust in Jesus? *Grace and Peace (v. 2)*

Ask: What is grace? How would you define it? *Grace: Unmerited favour or getting what we don't deserve; God's Riches At Christ's Expense. Grace is amazing and powerful because it sets us free from the consequences of all our sin (our mistakes) - every single one - and yet, it's offered to us freely when we trust in Jesus. There's nothing we can do to earn it, which is reassuring because it means there's no way to lose it.*

- But as the acronym above said - it comes at Christ's expense. Grace is free but not without cost. Just because it was free for us to receive doesn't mean it didn't cost anything - it's just that we weren't the ones to pay the price for it - Jesus did. It's this most valuable thing that Jesus gave his life for and so Paul wants us to see the absolute value in what God has given us.
- There's probably no one who understands how valuable this is better than Paul. Remembering all that Paul had done and experienced of course this would be the first thing he would want us to understand about what it means to trust Jesus and just how much God's grace can change you.

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- *The bit below here could be used with a more mature believer to understand how to not cheapen grace by taking it for granted.*
 - Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a pastor in Nazi Germany. The story of his life is amazing - well worth a look at if you've never done. He was one of the few Christians who spoke out against Hitler and actually ended up getting involved in a plot to assassinate Hitler. The plot failed and Bonhoeffer would end up dying for his faith, but during his short life he wrote a number of books and in one of them he

talks a lot about what he calls "cheap grace." Listen to what he says about it.

- "Grace is represented as the Church's inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. Grace without price; grace without cost! The essence of grace, we suppose, is that the account has been paid in advance; and, because it has been paid, everything can be had for nothing. Since the cost was infinite, the possibilities of using and spending it are infinite. What would grace be if it were not cheap?.....Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate. Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble; it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him....Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: 'ye were bought at a price,' and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us." (Taken from "The Cost of Discipleship," by Dietrich Bonhoeffer)
- What stands out to you from that quote?

Ask: If you give someone a really nice gift - maybe a little more extravagant than usual, what would that imply about how you see that person? What would that imply about that person's value? The grace that

we receive cost Jesus literally everything to give to us - what might that imply about our value and worth?

Ask: What is peace? How would you define it? *Peace can be defined as nothing missing, nothing broken. It's not just an absence of strife or fighting, but it means that everything is as it should be.*

Ask: Do you experience grace and peace all the time?

- Of course not! No one feels like they're always experiencing grace and peace. But the question is why?
- The easiest way to understand why we don't always experience grace and peace in our lives all the time is to think about a garden hose. God is the faucet or tap - He is the source of our grace and peace just like the tap is the source of the water. The Holy Spirit is the water - Grace and peace flows into our lives just as the the water flows through the hose. So....God, our source, is always "on" sending grace and peace. And the Holy Spirit, like the water, is always flowing. If the tap is on and the water is flowing then what would be the reason there's no water coming out of the garden hose?
- There's a kink in the hose! OR maybe the hose isn't connected to the source. So if we aren't experiencing God's grace and peace in our lives on a regular basis then either we aren't connected to the source or we've gotten ourselves twisted up.

Ask: What kinds of things do you think could cause there to be a kink in the hose - could cause things to get twisted up - and prevent you from experiencing God's grace and peace in your life? *Often, the thing that causes this is sin.*

Ask: Why do you think sin causes this to happen? Why do you think sin makes it difficult for us to experience God's grace and peace in our lives as we should?

Ask: What are some sin areas in your life that can prevent you from experiencing God's grace and peace? (*If you're doing this with a group and can't be personal enough to answer this then try a variation.*) What are some sin areas that can prevent people from experiencing God's grace and peace?

Ask: When we know we have grace and peace how does that change the way we view ourselves? How does that change the way we view our relationship with God? How does it impact our everyday lives?

Closing: How can you allow God's grace and peace into your life this week? In what area of your life could you use more of God's grace or peace?

Study 4: Our Identity: Every Spiritual Blessing (Eph. 1:3)

Intro: We're continuing in our study of the book of Ephesians. As a reminder, Ephesians will help us to answer two main questions: Who am I? (Identity) and Why am I here? (Purpose). Last time we met we began to talk about our identity.

Review:

1. Can you remember the two things we talked about last time we met? We said that there are two things that we receive from God all the time (we used the garden hose metaphor). *Grace & Peace*
2. And why did we say we don't always receive those in our lives even though God is always making them available to us? *Separation or Sin, ie, disconnection from God or getting twisted*

We're going to continue in our study by looking at the next sentence in Ephesians.

Read Ephesians 1:3.

Ask: Let's begin by looking at the first word at the start of the sentence. What does the word "praise" mean? *The dictionary says praise means "to express approval or admiration; to commend or extol". The idea is that if you're going to praise someone or something you must first see it as valuable and having worth and then you must express that in some way.*

Ask: Why is Paul saying he wants to praise God? *Because he's given us every spiritual blessing.*

Let's spend a few minutes to work out why this is such an important thing to receive from God.

Ask: What is a spiritual blessing? *These are the intangible (not physical) blessings of God like the fruits of the Spirit. They're the blessings that grow our faith and allow us to serve God in greater ways.*

Ask: Can you think of any examples of a spiritual blessing from the Bible? *They're things like love, joy, peace, patience - sometimes called the "fruits of the spirit" from Galatians 5:22-23.*

What should be clear is that God is not promising to make us wealthy or "bless us" (#blessed) in a physical sense. His aim is not about physical things.

Ask: Look at 2 Peter 1:3. Why does this verse say God gives us these things? *So that we are able to live a godly life.*

How cool is that? God asks us to live a life that pleases him and then he promises to give us everything we need so that we can do that. He doesn't ask us to do something that we aren't equipped to do.

Ask: Look again at Ephesians 1:3. Notice that it says that God, "has blessed us." What verb tense is this? Past, present or future? *It's past tense. That means every blessing God has for us has already been given to us. We already have it!*

Why does this matter?

- So actually if we pray and ask God to give us peace or to give us patience, etc. it doesn't make sense.
- Let me explain using the example of a car: Suppose someone gave me a car and it's sitting in my driveway and then I call them up and say, "I really need a car to drive. Is there any way you could help me out and give me a car?" That would be crazy. They'd say, "I already gave you one! It's sitting in your driveway." What if I walked to work every day wishing I had a car and every day I called the same person and said, "Please, I keep having to walk to work. Could you help me out and give me a car?" I would sound like a lunatic. There's a car in the driveway!

- We can ask God for these spiritual blessings but he's saying that he's already given us every blessing! So you might say, well, if God has already given me faith, patience, love, etc. then why doesn't it feel like it?
- It's not that we don't have these things - it's just that we need to learn how to use them in our lives.
- Think about the car again. I have a car in the driveway. But perhaps I've never learned to drive so I'm not using the car. The problem isn't that I need another car. What I need is to call the person who gave me the car and ask them if they will teach me how to drive it. Once I've learned to drive then I can use the car anytime I need it.
- God has given us all these spiritual blessings and what we need to do is to ask him how to use them in our lives. We need him to teach us how to use the gifts he's given us and then we can use them anytime we need them. But the amazing thing is recognising that as children of God we've already been given everything we need to follow God and serve him. We just have to learn how to use what we've been given.

Ask: So let's think about why all of this matters for us. Peter says in that 2 Peter verse that God has given us everything we need to live a godly life and we just have to ask God to help us to know how to put that into practice in our lives. What does that mean for who we are - our identity? Does that mean we can say I'm not really an X kind of person (patient, loving, etc)? *NO! We may not yet know how to live these things out the way that God created us to, but we have been given these gifts. We can live this way. We just need to keep learning from Jesus.*

Ask: What does this mean for how we should live - our purpose? Does it matter to God how we live? *YES! God has said he wants us to live a godly life. And he's so committed to us living that way that he's given us all the tools we need to do it and he's willing to teach us how to use them. A big part of our purpose is defined by what it means to live a life that is pleasing to God.*

Ask: How do you think we can have God's help to learn to use these gifts he's given us?

Ask: What do you think you would find challenging about this?

Ask: How does all of this make you feel about following Jesus?

Homework: Make a list of the spiritual blessings we have in Christ - from Ephesians. You could also include some listed from other places in the Bible (just write down the reference for where you found it). Then, choose one of these that you'd like God to help you to put into practice.

Study 5: Our Identity: Chosen & Adopted (Eph. 1:4-6)

Intro: As we continue in our study of Ephesians we're trying to answer the questions: Who am I (identity)? and Why am I here (purpose)? Today we're continuing our discussion around our identity.

Review: Let's start with a review of the last time we met.

1. Do you remember what it was that Paul said God gives to us? *Spiritual blessings*
2. We had homework to make a list of the spiritual blessings the Bible says we're given in Ephesians (or ones you found in other places in Scripture). What are some that you found?
3. The other part of the homework was to choose one that you'd like to ask God to help you to learn how to put into practice in your life. What did you choose? Why did you choose that in particular?

Let's continue with today's study.

Read Ephesians 1:4-6.

Ask: Share about a time when you were chosen for something or maybe a time when you were hurt because you weren't chosen. What connotations does the word chosen have for you?

Ask: How would you define the word chosen? What do you think it means? *Set apart, singled out for a purpose*

Ask: Think about how we choose people for jobs, or sports teams, or in other areas. What are the reasons people are usually chosen? *People are usually chosen because they have certain skills or talents. Maybe they're chosen because they look good or because of something they can do. In our culture, we tend to choose people based on merit or perceived value.*

Ask: Look at sentence 4 again. When does Paul say we were chosen by God? *God chose us before the creation of the world. Before we ever existed, before we ever did anything - God had already chosen us.*

Ask: What does Paul tell us is the reason God chose us? *God chose us because it was his desire and pleasure to do so (v. 5). Just because he loved us and it gave him pleasure. No other reason. God did not choose us because of our merit or our own worth. He didn't choose us because of what we have or haven't done.*

Ephesians also says that another part of our identity is that we have been adopted by God.

Ask: What is the difference between a biological and an adopted child?

- There is no “oops” baby with an adopted child. Biologically speaking, a couple could accidentally get pregnant and have a baby. But no one accidentally adopts a child.
- An adopted child requires an act of will. It takes time and effort. And it costs a lot.
- God says that we are adopted. We are not his children by accident. He chose us on purpose, for a purpose. He took the time and effort to pursue us. And he paid the high price of sacrificing the life of his only Son just so that we could be his children. You are THAT valuable to God!
- In addition, a child who's adopted legally has all the same rights as a biological child.

Read 1 John 3:1.

- This verse is quite similar to what Paul has written in Ephesians.

Ask: Why does this verse say we are God's children? *Simply because God loves us.*

Ask: That verse uses a similar word used later in Ephesians. It's the word “lavished”. That's a great word! What do you think it means?

What does that say about how God gives his love to us? *The dictionary defines "lavish" as "to give in great amounts or without limit". God's love is endless. He gives it to us without any limits.*

- Just as in Ephesians, God is making it clear in this passage that the reason we're chosen is because of his love - not because of anything we've done. It isn't based on our own merit or anything we could do.
- In fact, Paul points out that God chooses us for two simple reasons (look at Ephesians 1:5): He chooses us for his pleasure and will (or purpose). God chooses us for his pleasure - he loves us. He chooses us simply because he wanted to and has a purpose for us.

Ask: How does that make you feel? What does that make you think about your identity - who God says you are? How might that affect the way you live?

Closing: What is one thing you could do to remind yourself of this truth throughout your week?

Study 6: Our Identity: Redeemed (Eph. 1:7-10)

Intro: As we continue in our study of Ephesians we are trying to answer the questions: Who am I (identity)? and Why am I here (purpose)? Today we are continuing our discussion around our identity.

Review: Last time we met we discussed what Paul meant when he said that God chose us and adopted us. We discussed the significance of those ideas. We ended our discussion thinking about something we could do to remind ourselves of this truth throughout the week (or two) since we last met.

Did you have any moments where you were particularly able to remind yourself of this? Did you do something that you found helpful in reminding you of your identity in Jesus - who you are?

We've been talking about a variety of things that God says about our identity. Looking back at the first 6 verses in Ephesians 1, can you remember some of the words we discussed as describing our identity? (Hint: There are 6 things - some are more than one word - they are more of an idea) *Saints, every spiritual blessing, given grace, given peace, chosen, adopted*

Read Ephesians 1:7-10.

Ask: What does Paul say we have in v. 7? *Redemption*

Ask: What do you think that word "redemption" means? What do you think it means that Paul says we have redemption - or we have been redeemed?

- Understanding the idea of "redemption" can be tricky. Perhaps this is a helpful illustration: Have you ever used a voucher or gift certificate? How do they work?
- In essence you turn in the voucher/certificate and you receive the service or item. Does that mean the item was free?

- So how is it possible for you to get something for free if the price hasn't changed and you haven't paid for it?
- It might seem a silly example but it helps us to understand what Paul means when it says we have been redeemed. It means, we have received something for free because someone else paid.

Ask: Look again at v. 7. What does it say we have received for free?

Forgiveness of sins

Ask: What is the price to have sins forgiven? (Look at Romans 6:23 for a hint) *Death - someone has to die to pay the price for sin (sin has a cost - we can't just do anything we want and it costs nothing)*

Ask: So we've received forgiveness of sins for free even though we should have had to pay the price for this sin - our own death and separation from God. Look once more at v. 7. How does it say we have received this forgiveness for free? Who paid the price? *It says that we have received it through Jesus' blood.*

Ask: How would your everyday life be different if you lived as if you were a forgiven person? What is the hardest part of this truth to accept?

Ask: Look at the end of v.7 and beginning of v. 8. Why does Paul say God gives us this redemption? In other words, what is the reason we received it and how does God feel about it? *We have received redemption because of God's grace (on the basis of who HE is not who WE are). And God does not do this begrudgingly but rather, Paul says he lavished his grace on us - he gives it freely and in abundance.*

Ask: Look at the rest of v. 8 and into v. 9. What is the other thing Paul says that God gives to us? *The mystery of his will - in other words - Paul says that God has made known to us the mystery of why he's done what he's done.*

Ask: What is the mystery God is making known to us according to Paul? *(Look at v. 10 for help) It says "to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ."*

Ask: What do you think that phrase means?

- The idea here is that God's will is to unite people together again by restoring us back to God. We were made for a relationship with God and with each other and as we come back to God, we also come back to each other and we begin to be what we were always meant to be.

Ask: And how do these verses say that God does this? How does God unite everyone and bring them back to God? (Hint: v. 9) *He does it through Jesus' death.*

Ask: How might our relationships with other people be affected if we believed and lived this truth?

Homework: Begin to memorize Ephesians 1:18-19.

Study 7: Our Identity: An Inheritance & the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:11-14)

Intro: Today we are continuing our study in Ephesians discovering what God says about our identity (Who am I?) and our purpose (Why am I here?). Last time we met we discussed redemption. Can you remember what we said it means to be redeemed? *Receiving something for free that someone else paid for - for us that something is eternal life and a relationship with God because Jesus paid for our sins.*

Read Ephesians 1:11-14.

Ask: The first thing to notice is those first words in v. 11. What are they? *In him*

Ask: Think back to that first week we met when you had to underline all of the "in him" and "in Christ" phrases in this chapter. What did we say those meant? *They remind us that all of these promises are only true about us because we are "in Christ" because we have chosen to be Christians through Jesus.*

Ask: In this section Paul tells us that we will receive something because of our identity as sons and daughters of God. What is it that we will receive? (Look to v. 14 for a hint.) *An inheritance*

Ask: What is an inheritance in a general sense? What does it mean to inherit something? How/When do you receive it? *An inheritance is something that you receive because someone else has died. It's been set aside for you and after that person dies then you receive what was set aside for you.*

Ask: What do you think it is that Paul is saying we have inherited? How did we get it? *Our inheritance is our identity - it's all that we've been talking about in Ephesians so far - grace, peace, spiritual blessings, sons/daughters who are loved, accepted, adopted, chosen, redeemed, forgiven and on and on and on. All of this we have received - that is*

what we have inherited from God. He set it aside for us. And we received it only because of and after accepting Jesus' death on the cross for us.

Ask: Look back at v. 13. Notice that it says "you were marked in him with a seal". What do you think that means? What is meant by that word "seal"?

- There could be two ways to understand the idea of this word "seal". The first is to think about an animal that has been branded. What does it mean if an animal has been branded? *It's a mark of ownership or belonging.*
- The second way to understand this word is to think about the context of a seal in ancient times. A seal on an envelope bore the mark of the person who sent the letter. This verified not only who it was from, but its authenticity. If this seal was broken, it meant the letter had been tampered with in some way.

Ask: So with this understanding of what is meant by a "seal," what do you think it means that Paul says we are "sealed"? *Essentially, God has guaranteed or insured that because of Jesus' death we now belong to him. We can be secure and sure of that and we can be sure that what we have received is authentically from God.*

Ask: What does Paul tell us is the seal that guarantees all of this for us? (Hint: look at v. 13) *The promised Holy Spirit*

Ask: What does Paul say about the Holy Spirit if you keep reading there? How does the Holy Spirit act as God's seal on us? *It says that the Holy Spirit is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance and redemption.*

Ask: How do deposits work - say if you were going to buy a house or a car? *A deposit or down payment is the guarantee that you will pay some now to guarantee that you will come back to pay the rest and buy the car or house.*

Ask: So if the Holy Spirit is the deposit or down payment then what is he guaranteeing God will do? *Paul is telling us that we have the Holy Spirit with us - that God himself comes to live inside of us as his Holy Spirit. God does this so that we can be absolutely certain that he will come back to claim what belongs to him. He will come back for us. He will keep his promises to us. We can have assurance that we will fully inherit all that he has promised to us.*

Ask: One last thing to notice. Look at that last little line in v. 14. Why does Paul say that God does this? Why does God guarantee our identity and the promises that he's give in this way? *It says "to the praise of his glory." It's all for God's glory. Our identity isn't bestowed upon us to be about us. When we know who we are in Christ, we give glory (weight, proof, evidence) of the nature of God. Our identity isn't about us; it's about God.*

Homework: Base this on how much they already know about the Holy Spirit. For example, you could assign something like: Find 3 characteristics of the Holy Spirit from scripture—one that you already believe/experience, one that you have a question about, and one that you want to pray about experiencing in your own life OR Find 10 verses about the Holy Spirit. *Note/Suggestion: Francis Chan's book Forgotten God is an excellent resource about the Holy Spirit and his work in our lives. Keep memorising Eph. 1:18-19.*

Study 8: Our Identity: What the Gospel has to say about who we are (Eph. 1:15-23)

Intro: We've been working on memorising Ephesians 1:18-19. How is it going for you? Want to give it a try?

Read Ephesians 1:13.

Ask: How would you explain what the Gospel is? *An easy way to remember is: God made it, we broke it, Jesus is fixing it.*

Ask: Do you know what those three phrases mean? *God is the creator of the world. We "broke" God's creation through our sinfulness. Jesus is fixing what we broke through his death on the cross and by continuing to help us to become what God created us to be (redeeming and restoring).*

Ask: In the Greek, the word "gospel" means good news. Understanding what we mean when we say gospel, do you think that story is good news? Why?

Read Ephesians 1:15-23.

- In this section we get a look at Paul's sincere prayer for this church that he cares about so much. Let's take a closer look at v. 18-19 and think about what this says to us about who we are in Christ.

Ask: Why do you think Paul uses the phrase "eyes of your heart"? *This is more than just an intellectual understanding of their identity. He wants them to know deeply in their hearts who they are in Christ.*

Ask: What are the three things that Paul wants them to understand or "see"? *The hope to which they've been called, the riches of his glorious inheritance, and his incomparably great power.*

Ask: Let's take a look at those three things as each of them says something about our identity. What is the hope that Paul says we have because we are in Christ? *We have hope because of all the reasons we've already talked about - we've been given grace, we are blessed, chosen, adopted, redeemed, sealed and the list goes on. We have received the good news of the Gospel to redeem and restore us. God wants our eyes to be opened to recognise all that he has done for us so that we are filled with hope.*

Ask: The second phrase talks about his glorious inheritance. Remember last time we met we talked about an inheritance. What do you remember about that? *It's something you receive after someone dies. It's something of value.*

Ask: Here's the really cool part. Look again at v. 18. Who is receiving the inheritance? *It's "his glorious inheritance". God is the one receiving the inheritance.*

Ask: And what does v. 18 say is God's inheritance? What is he receiving? *"His holy people" - that's us!*

- So to understand this, we can understand that God wanted to have relationship with us. He loved us that much. And it was Jesus' death that made it possible for us to have a relationship with God again. So God is saying that when Jesus died, WE became his inheritance (because you only receive an inheritance after someone dies!). We are the joy of God's heart. He loves us THAT much. It's a bit hard to imagine isn't it?!

Ask: And the third phrase is about the incomparably great power for us who believe. What does that mean? What is that power? Where does it come from? *It is God's power that he gives to us because we are in Christ. You might notice in v. 19-20 Paul reminds us that this is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead!*

- We are told that we have been given power. And not just any power, but he says incomparably great. Literally, we have power without compare - there's nothing else like it. We have the power in us, through the Holy Spirit, to do anything that God asks us to do.
- So just these two verses tell us that in Christ we are filled with hope, we are loved and we are given power. More powerful words about our identity...about who we really are.

Ask: What part of those verses has stood out to you from this discussion?

(These remaining questions are optional. Discuss 1, 2 or all 3 as appropriate.)

Ask: What identity have you been holding onto that you need to let go of in order to embrace your identity as God's dearly loved son/daughter?

Ask: Are you learning how to listen to what the Father is saying about who you are? How are you doing that? OR How can you begin to do that better?

Ask: Are you willing to put yourself in the place where others can reflect to you the truth of your identity? Are you willing to let others point out when you're missing the truth of what God says about you? How can this happen?

Study 9: Our Identity: Dead to Alive (Eph. 2:1-7)

Intro: So far in Ephesians we've been looking at our identity, who God says we are. What are some things you can remember that we've learned so far?

Today we are going to continue talking a bit more about our identity. Paul tells us in Ephesians that our identity has an impact on how we make decisions. Let's take a look at what he has to say.

Read Ephesians 2:1-7.

Ask: Take a close look at v. 1-3. According to these verses, Paul says that people fall into one of two categories. What are they? *Dead or alive or obedient or disobedient.*

Ask: What does Paul mean when he says that people are dead or disobedient? Is he saying they are actually dead and come back to life? *This is not about being physically dead but spiritually dead. He's saying that those who don't yet know Jesus as their Saviour are spiritually dead. Or he also says they are disobedient, meaning they don't obey God.*

Ask: What does Paul say is the thing that motivates the decisions of someone who is dead or disobedient (look at v. 3 for a hint)? *He says that they make decisions based on the cravings or desires and thoughts of the flesh.*

Ask: What does that mean?

- The best way to understand this is to think about what actually makes up a person. Every person is made up of a body, a soul and a spirit. Your body is - your body! The way you physically act and move around in the world. Your spirit is the part of you that is connected to God (or not). And your soul is made up of your will, emotions and spirit.

- So, Paul says that people who are disobedient to God make decisions by following what their body wants to do. The body craves something, then it affects the emotions and eventually it moves to your will and that's when you decide to act.
- Does this make sense? Can you give an example of something simple where we make decisions driven first by our body's cravings and desires? (ie, to help them think: you could offer an example of a craving for something you shouldn't have like sweets. Body craves it, emotions say I need it and want it, so then our will chooses to just eat it. Then, if we were trying to eat healthy we feel guilty later.)

Ask: So if people who are dead or disobedient make choices that are driven by or motivated by the cravings or desires of the body (Pauls calls it the flesh), then what motivates or drives the decisions of someone who is alive or obedient? *If a person is made up of Body, Soul and Spirit and the body is what drives a disobedient person then it would make sense that it's the Spirit that drives an obedient person.*

Ask: Let's think a little bit more about this to try to understand what it means. Read Galatians 5:13-25. Paul also, wrote this letter to another church and he talks about the very same thing we are talking about from Ephesians. He says a lot of things in this section. What are some of the things you noticed about how we make decisions? (Don't need to discuss all of these, but these are some of the things they might mention.) *Indulging the flesh - making decisions driven by our body means we end up hurting not only ourselves, but often others (v.13-15). If the Spirit is what drives your decisions then you will make different choices. (v.16) The choices made by the Spirit are opposite of the choices made by the body (v. 16-17). Paul's list of things that we do when lead by our bodies shows how far we go when we allow ourselves to be driven by our worst inclinations unchecked (v. 19-21). It's easy to see that the decisions made when driven by the Spirit are very different (v. 22). So Paul says we have to "crucify the flesh" and instead allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit, meaning to make decisions motivated by our Spirit not our body (v. 24-25).*

Ask: What Spirit do you think Paul is referring to in this Galatians passage? *The Holy Spirit - God gives us the Holy Spirit when we become Christians to help us so that we can make different choices, because it wouldn't be possible on our own.*

Ask: What do you think Paul means in v. 24 when he says we need to "crucify the flesh"? *This is about letting that part of ourselves die. In other words, not letting our decisions be decided by what our body craves. But it doesn't happen on it's own just because we are Christians. We have to actively seek to say no to that side of ourselves and instead lean into allowing the Holy Spirit to help us to make different decisions.*

Let's take a look at two more things in Ephesians 2.

Ask: Look at v. 1 again. What is the verb tense? It says "you were dead in your transgressions and sins." Is that past, present or future? *Past tense*

Ask: Why do you think it might be significant for our identity to be reminded that this is past tense? *Because that means that this isn't who we are anymore. We aren't defined by our worst mistakes. And we don't have to feel hopeless as if we are doomed to repeat those mistakes forever because we now have the Holy Spirit.*

- It's also worth noting that this is a helpful reminder that we should have compassion and grace on those who don't yet know Jesus. They don't have the Holy Spirit, so they don't have anyone helping them to not make wrong choices. So we shouldn't judge someone who hasn't made the same commitment to follow Jesus that we have.

Ask: One last thing to notice from Ephesians 2. Take a look at v. 4-5. What does it say about our identity now? *It says that we are no longer dead, but have been made alive.*

Ask: Notice it does not say you were bad and now you're good. It says you were dead and now you're alive. Why do you think it might matter that it's not about being bad and now being good, but rather dead to alive?

- Bad and good are subjective. You could see a room with a pile of chairs all a mess and say that's bad. But if I said I had asked someone to put the chairs like that for a reason then it would actually be good because it's what I asked. So good and bad are arbitrary and who can be the judge of what is good and bad?
- But dead and alive are objective. If something is dead, it just is. It's not up to anyone's interpretation. And when something is alive, it just is. So Paul is clear - not having Jesus means we are sinners and that makes us dead. Fact. But Jesus came back to life after dying on the cross and he brings us back to life with him. That's why some people say it's like being "born again". It's the start of life in a whole new way with a whole new identity.
- We are no longer defined by the past. And we are alive in a whole new way with the ability to make new choices.
- And v. 6-7 remind us of just how amazing this new life is: God does this because he is gracious and kind with us, not because we've earned it or deserve it, but just because he loves us.

Homework: Take some time this week to journal some answers to these questions: What is one area of your life that is dead now that you are in Christ (that part of your life is no more)? What's one area that's been brought to life?

Study 10: Our Identity: The Clock Analogy (Eph. 2:8-10)

Intro: Last time we met we talked about how our identity in Christ means that we have been brought from death to life. Can you remember what we said it means to be dead but now alive?

We ended last time with the homework to journal or think about an area of our lives that have been brought to life because of our faith in Jesus. Can you share something about that?

Read Ephesians 2:8-10.

Ask: What is grace? *It is unmerited or undeserved favour from God - getting what we don't deserve. Sometimes this is described as having permission to fail, meaning we don't have to be perfect. Another way to remember it is - God's Riches At Christ's Expense.*

Ask: Why is this grace so important to our relationship with God (see v. 8-9 for a hint)? *Grace is the whole reason we can have any relationship with God. It's because God was willing to give us grace that we are able to receive salvation through Jesus. Nothing could be more important than this.*

Ask: What does this passage say about how we receive this grace from God? *It comes through faith - NOT through anything we can do ourselves but only ever as a gift from God.*

Ask: Do you think there are any areas of your life where you still sometimes rely on "works," things you can do, to save yourself or to be more pleasing to God?

Ask: Why does Paul say it's so important that we know that our salvation isn't at all dependent on us and what we do? *He says in v. 9 so that no one can boast. We can't in any way take the credit for what God has done in our lives and that's important.*

Ask: Why do you think it matters who gets the credit?

Ask: Can you think of any specific moments in your life where you've experienced grace from God?

Ask: Take a look again at v. 10. What does Paul say we are in this verse? *He says that we are God's handiwork. Some Bibles say workmanship.*

In the Greek that word for handiwork is the word "poema," which literally means masterpiece. Paul says you are God's masterpiece and you've been created by God to do good work. You've been created on purpose for a purpose.

Ask: Which of these do you think is most true: Who I am determines what I do OR What I do makes me who I am?

Let me help you to understand this question by giving you an analogy of a clock. What does a clock do? It tells time right? If I buy a clock in a store, it often doesn't come with batteries. So at that moment it's not actually telling the time. Is it still a clock? Of course it is - even when a clock isn't telling time because it's broken or its batteries are dead or whatever - it's still a clock.

Now, what if I start counting - one one thousand, two one thousand, three one thousand? What am I doing? I'm counting the time - basically telling time right? Does that make me a clock? Of course not!

In the same way, what I do doesn't make me who I am anymore than counting makes me a clock. But rather, who I am determines what I do.

Look again at Ephesians 2:10 and notice the order.

- We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus (who we are)
- for good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (what we do)
- Who we are determines what we do.
- When we understand who we are, then we are able to begin to walk in what we know - meaning we are able to know what to do or how to live.

Homework: Begin to work on the vision worksheet. Take time to work through answering the questions to help to give yourself an idea of how God has created you with unique gifts, personality, skills and perspective that allows you to do something specific that he's created you to do.

Vision Worksheet

Begin by looking at these Bible passages where God is giving vision to people in the Bible...

- Neh. 1:11, 2:2-5, 6:15
- Gen. 6: 9-22
- Judges 13: 1-5
- 1 Sam. 16: 7-13
- Esther 2:15, 4: 12-17
- Exodus 3 and 4

Now take some time to answer the questions below. If you're not sure how to answer a question or are unsure of what it means, then speak to the person leading you through the study to discuss it together.

Questions about your emotions:

What turns you on in life? What turns you off emotionally?

During what situations do you feel most alive or exuberant?

Which Bible figures capture your imagination? Why?

What makes life worth living?

Who are the 3 most important people in your life?

Who are the 3 people you most respect? Why?

What is your personality type? How does that impact your ministry?

Questions about your abilities:

What are your spiritual gifts?

What goals have you set and reached during the past five years?

What goals have you set and failed to achieve during that period?

What kept you from meeting your goals?

What goals are you afraid to set because you feel incapable of reaching them?

In what ways did God make you different from others? What unique or special talents do you possess?

Questions about your intellect and perspective:

How would you define a successful church? What would it take for your church to be successful?

How would you define a successful pastor? What would it take for you to be successful?

How would you define a godly Christian leader? How well do you fit that description?

What differentiates a Christian leader from a non-Christian leader?

Questions about your heart:

What makes you cry? Why?

If you could accomplish only one task in life, what would it be? (Be honest on this)

For what opportunities or outcomes would you be willing to endure physical persecution? Intellectual or emotional persecution?

Which passages of the Bible speak most loudly and consistently to you?

What sins do you commit most often?

How deep is your relationship with God right now? What has the growth curve of your relationship with Him been over the past year?

What activities do you get totally absorbed in? What activities are you unlikely to grow out of as you mature?

What are the five values of human character to which you feel you must at all times, at all costs, be true?

What characteristics are you committed to perfect in your life?

Questions about your mentors and models:

Who are the 5 spiritual leaders you have known personally whom you would most like to imitate? Why?

Who have been the 5 most influential spiritual leaders in your life other than Jesus? Why?

Other than spiritual mentors, who has influenced your life the most? How did they influence you? What gave them that permission?

What are the characteristics of an ideal pastor? Which of these do you possess? Which ones do you not possess?

Questions about your ministry:

Are you currently ministering on the basis of vision? If so, whose vision is it? How did you acquire that vision?

Which ministry activities make you depressed? Which ones make you most ambivalent? Which ones turn you off?

What is your vision for your personal ministry, that is, the vision for your ministry apart from what you do as pastor of the church?

Which people groups do you feel naturally drawn to in ministry?

What ministry experiences have provided you with the greatest fulfillment? Which experiences produced the greatest disappointment?

What is the role of your family in light of your ministry obligations?

Study 11: Our Identity: Reconciliation (Eph. 2:11-18)

Intro: Last time we met we talked about the clock analogy. Can you remember what the clock analogy was? Can you remember how it related to your identity?

- A clock is a clock whether or not it's working (doing what it was made for). And even if I act like a clock it doesn't make me a clock!
- Who we are is rooted in our identity in Christ NOT in what we do? We are also who God says we are, whether or not we are doing the thing that God created us to do.

Did you start working on your vision worksheet at all? How is that going?

Read Ephesians 2:11-18.

Ask: This passage begins with Paul asking them to remember what they were like before they became Christians. What were you like before you were a Christian? Or, if you can't remember a time when you weren't a Christian, what WOULD you be like if you didn't have Jesus in your life?

Ask: Look at v. 12. How does Paul describe those who don't yet know Jesus? *They are separate from Christ, excluded from the promises (covenants) of God, without hope and without God in the world.*

Ask: Christians may sometimes tend to be judgmental of those who aren't Christians and do wrong things. How do you think Paul's statements in v.12 might affect the way we think about people who don't yet know Jesus?

- Hopefully, this creates a sense of empathy, compassion and love for people who are living without God. Rather than judgement, we should recognise that people who aren't Christians can't be expected

to live like Christians. And actually, living without hope and without God would be a much harder way to live.

- Paul goes on to talk about the transformation that begins to happen in a person once they become a Christian. That's because Jesus' death on the cross means we don't have to be separated from God anymore.

Ask: Paul says in v. 16 that in this process what God is doing is reconciling us. What does the word reconcile mean? *It might have been a while since many of us have done this but there was a time when you had a chequebook and you would reconcile it at the end of the month. That means you take what's written in your book and make sure it lines up with what the bank says you have in your account. The bank is the standard. If there's any mistakes, you make the necessary corrections so your bank book is reconciled, or aligned, with the bank balance. This is what Paul says that God does with us. In fact, Paul talks about three kinds of reconciliation. Let's take a quick look to understand them.*

Ask: First, Paul says we are reconciled with God. How would you explain what that means, thinking about our explanation of the bank balance above? *God is the standard and when we are not Christians (as in v. 11-12) then we are not lined up with God - with what is right. So God says in v. 13 that through Jesus the correction is made to allow us to be made right, to be aligned with God. An easy way to remember this is the word "atone," which also looks like "at one". So Christ's blood atones for our sins so that we can be at one with God.*

Ask: The second area of reconciliation is to reconcile with yourself. Any guesses what that might mean in light of all that we've talked about in Ephesians and with our definition of reconciled in mind? *Reconciling with yourself is lining up the truth about what God says about who you are with what you actually believe about yourself. If God says you are His workmanship, but you are still hung up on not thinking you're good enough, then you have to continuously reconcile yourself to the truth of God by being in His word, allowing God to transform you*

and teach you His truth about who you are. We will spend our entire lives in this process, but to the degree we are able to do this, will affect us in the third area of reconciliation...

Ask: The last area of reconciliation is with others. Read Romans 12:18. How do you think we can be at peace with all people? How might our ability to be reconciled with what God says about us affect our ability to be reconciled with other people? *When we are not aligned and in unity with others, many times it's because of sin, ours, theirs or both. Romans 12:18 calls us to be at peace with all people as much as it depends on us. When we are healthy in our own identity in Christ, our insecurities, past and fears no longer hold us back in our relationships. We are not hindered in how we interact with others because we are secure and confident in who we are in Christ. This completely changes the way we relate to people.*

- Leader Note: This would be a good point to share a personal story of reconciliation from your own life - whether resolved or not - to demonstrate that we're all learning and growing in these lessons.

Homework: Think about the three areas of reconciliation and choose one that you can work on. Is God wanting to reconcile with you? Or maybe you need to help someone else to reconcile with God? Is there an area where you need to work on reconciling with yourself and believing what God says about you? Or perhaps there is someone that God wants you to take steps to reconcile with?

You should also take the opportunity to keep working on your vision worksheet.

Study 12: Our Identity: Foundation (Eph. 2:19-22)

Intro: Last time we met we talked about being reconciled with God, ourselves and others. What did those three things mean?

Read Ephesians 2:19-22.

Ask: What does it mean to be a citizen of a country? What specific rights do you have as a citizen of your country? How is that different from a stranger, alien, or sojourner?

Ask: What does this section of Ephesians say about our citizenship?
That we are no longer foreigners and strangers, but citizens of Heaven and part of God's household.

Ask: Why do you think that might be significant or meaningful?

Ask: Share 5 words (gender, personality trait, ethnicity, role, etc) that describe you. Which of these is most foundational to who you are? Why?

Ask: What is the importance of a foundation in terms of a building? Have you ever seen a foundation being laid on a home or building? *A building foundation is the key part of the structure. Even though it isn't seen, it will be evident if it's not there. A foundation that is lacking in some way will especially be evident when something bad happens (eg., earthquake).*

Ask: What does Paul tell us about our foundation? What is it built on?
The apostles and prophets with Jesus as the cornerstone.

Ask: What is a cornerstone? What do you think Paul means when he says that Jesus is the cornerstone? *The cornerstone is the first piece that is laid in the foundation. All of the other stones are laid on top of it and are lined up to it. It is the key piece of the foundation because this is the one piece that make sure all the other stones are lined up straight*

and in the correct place. If the cornerstone is placed wrong or missing, the foundation won't be strong. So if Jesus is the cornerstone then he should be the first thing in our lives and the one around whom everything else in our lives lines up.

- Who we are in Christ, where Christ is in our lives, is the most important thing about us. What he says about us is more important than what we say about ourselves (gender, nationality, role, key personality trait, etc). Our identity is key. It's at the foundation. That's why we must build our identity on Jesus and on what he says about us so that our whole life builds on top of that.
- In the same way that a beautiful building brings honour, glory and praise to its designer and builder, so the same is true for us. As we grow and are being built in our identity, all the honour, glory and praise goes to our Designer and Builder, Jesus, not to us. It's important to understand our identity in Christ, but it's also important to remember that our identity isn't just for our own sake, but to reflect who God is to the rest of the world.

Ask: How could us living in our identity in Christ the way Paul tells us to in Ephesians bring glory and honour to God? How could that help others who don't know God to see him?

Ask: How are we being built/growing? *By the Spirit. We can't make ourselves into these people; this is the work of the Holy Spirit in us.*

Ask: And why is the Spirit building us up like this? *So we can become a dwelling in which God lives. That means every time someone has an encounter with us, if we are allowing ourselves to be built up in Christ, then they will also have an encounter with the living Saviour through us.*

Ask: What do you find most encouraging about what we've discussed today? What do you find most challenging? What's one thing God might be saying to you today? What will you do about it?

Study 13: Our Purpose: Vision (Eph. 3:1-9)

Intro: Last time we met we talked about Jesus as our cornerstone.

What did we say a cornerstone was? How did that relate to Jesus in our lives?

What was one thing God was saying to you the last time we met? How did you respond to what God was saying to you in the past week or two?

Read Ephesians 3:1-9.

Ask: What is a vision? What do you think it means to have a vision for your life? *The dictionary defines a vision as "the act or power of anticipating that which will or may come to be". A vision for our lives is about allowing God to show us what he has called us to do with our lives. Sometimes we have clarity around that for the whole trajectory of our lives and other times we have a vision for just a season of our lives and then God shows us something new.*

Ask: Look at the passage we just read, what is Paul's vision? *He says he's realised that the Gospel is for both Jews and Gentiles and he has been given the vision to share the good news about Jesus with the Gentiles and to help them to understand that they too have been included in God's gift of salvation through Jesus (v. 7-9).*

Ask: How does he know that is the vision for his life? *He says in v. 3 that it was revealed to him by God. Then in v. 7 he says that it is by the power of the Spirit he had clarity that this was what God was calling him to do with his life.*

Ask: Do you think that God has a vision or purpose for everyone's life? Or do you think that's only something for special people or people employed by a church?

Read Matthew 28:18-20.

Ask: What is Jesus saying to do in this passage? Who is this vision or purpose for life being given to? Does it include us? What does Jesus say is the source of power for those who've been given this vision?

- Ultimately, Jesus is the one giving the vision or purpose to his disciples - those who would follow him. Essentially, ANY person who follows Jesus has been given a vision or purpose. In a big picture way, we all have the same purpose!
- What makes each of us unique is the WAY we obey this command from Jesus (notice he doesn't make a request here - he just says go do it!). We're all called to share the good news about Jesus and teach others what we have learned and are learning. Our unique purpose or vision comes in HOW we do that.
- You'll also notice that Jesus says that he's given us the power and authority to do what he's asked us to do. Look back at Ephesians 3:7 - Paul similarly says that the vision he has was given to him by God and through his power.

Ask: What are some of the ways that people might have the same purpose from God but different visions for their lives? What might that look like? *Talk through the various ways people might use their skills, gifts, passions, life experiences to be obedient to Jesus. For example, not everyone is called to be a pastor. Some are teachers who use their skills with kids to share Jesus' love. Some do that by being a parent. Some do that in a work environment. Some work in charitable organizations. And all of us do that in how we live and build relationships with people. This is why the vision worksheet can be so valuable. It can help to open our eyes to how God wants us to use our unique gifts, personalities and experiences to fulfil the purpose he has for us. Sometimes just the process of answering those questions can create space for the Holy Spirit to speak to us.*

Of course, having a vision from God for our lives is only the first step. It doesn't mean it will always be easy. If you read the account of Paul's life in Acts, you can see many deterrents to his vision. It would be worth reading through Acts to notice some of what Paul experienced when trying to do what God had called him to do. Paul summarises some of this in one passage in Corinthians. Let's take a look.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:23-29.

Ask: What are some of the circumstances that may have caused him to stop pursuing his vision?

Ask: What do you think caused Paul to pursue his vision despite the obstacles?

Ask: What are some obstacles you could face in pursuing the vision God has for your life? What could be a motivation for you to keep pursuing it? How could you keep that motivation in focus in the the challenging moments?

Ideally, the rest of this session would be spent discussing, discerning and praying through the answers from the vision worksheet. You may want to do this in two sessions. If you're doing this in a group, then you'd want to invite those who would like to discuss their worksheet answers to set a time to meet with you personally. Otherwise, encourage them to keep working on their answers and taking time to consider what God might be saying to them.

Homework: The homework would just be to consider any takeaways or challenges from the vision worksheet and what action steps they will take.

Study 14: Our Purpose: Rooted in Love (Eph. 3:14-19)

Intro: The last time we met we talked about vision and purpose and what God might be calling you to personally. What have you sensed God saying to you over this time? What, if any, action steps have you taken?

Read Ephesians 3:14-19.

Ask: What does Paul pray for the Ephesians in this passage? *He asks that God would strengthen them with power in the inner being and that they would know the depth of God's love for them.*

Ask: How does this prayer compare with other things he's prayed for them earlier in the letter? *In ch. 1 he prays for God to reveal himself to them but he does pray similarly that they would know the hope and love that God has for them and the power available to them.*

Ask: Take a look at v. 17 again. What comes to mind when Paul talks about being "rooted and established" or "rooted and grounded"?

Ask: What is it that Paul wants them to be rooted in? Love

Ask: Why do you think this would be the thing that Paul wants to pray for them? *We've seen again and again throughout Ephesians that our identity is rooted in God's love for us. God's love is a defining characteristic of who we are and Paul wants them to recognise this because it will affect their ability to do what God has called them to do. If the love of God defines who we are then it will also define how we live.*

Ask: In v. 18 Paul continues his prayer by asking God to give them power. What is it that he wants them to have power to do? *He wants them to have power to understand the depth of God's love for them.*

Ask: Why do you think Paul says they would need power from the Holy Spirit to understand and be filled up by God's love? *I think there must be a recognition here by Paul that despite the fact that we might know the truth of God's love for us it can be difficult for us to really understand it or believe it on our own.*

These few verses are such a powerful prayer. Paul is commending us to dig deeply into God's love. That our faith and identity is rooted in the love that God has for us. Ultimately, he prays that we might have strength from God to comprehend God's love and allow it to fill us up. The reason for this passionate prayer about understanding God's love and allowing it to be rooted in our lives is because Paul knows that when we are "filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" it changes us.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:18.

Ask: What does this verse say will happen when we can fully see and understand God's glory? *We are transformed into the image of God!*

The more that we are rooted in understanding and living within the fullness of God's love for us the more that we will begin to live and act like Jesus!

Ask: Why would it be important for us to live and act like Jesus? *Because we will be better able to fulfil the purpose that God has for us, to share the good news about Jesus, if we are filled with God's love and learn to live as Jesus lived!*

Ask: Look once more at Ephesians 3:18. How does Paul say we will discover the strength to understand the love of Christ and allow it to work in us? *"Together with all the Lord's holy people" - we do it together! Discuss the importance of community with other Christians as we dig into our identity and purpose in Jesus.*

Paul wants us to grasp the dimensions of God's love. Its width, length, height and depth. Let's take some time to consider what that means.

Read Psalm 139.

Ask: How does this passage help you to understand more about the dimensions of God's love?

Ask: Let's think in real terms for your life. Breadth - What is the scope of the love of God (i.e. range of ways they have experienced God's love)? Length - share about an extended time where they especially needed to be reminded of God's love. Height - talk about a high point in their life when they realised God's love for them. Depth - talk about a low point in their life when they realised God's love for them. *Be prepared with an example or two of your own to share to help prompt their thinking in this area.*

Homework: This time we want to put into action what we are learning - God's love should change us. The more we learn about and understand the love of God the more we should have to give to others. There's 3 options: 1) Tell someone you're a Christian and why you love Jesus. 2) Tell someone who needs to hear it that Jesus loves them and why that's good news. or 3) Read 1 John 3:18 - find a specific way to put love in action for someone.

Study 15: Our Purpose: God's Power in Us (Eph. 3:20-21)

Intro: The last time we met we talked about being rooted in God's love and allowing that to affect the way we live. Our homework was to find a way to put that into action this week. How did that go?

This is our final week of the study. We'll finish by thinking about God's power and what it looks like when it's at work in our lives. We've said throughout that we have both an identity and a purpose through our relationship with Jesus. The power of God at work in us is part of both our identity and our purpose.

Read Ephesians 3:20-21.

Ask: What are some dreams or big ideas you have - maybe prompted from your vision worksheet or just something that's been in your heart and mind for a while?

Ask: What do you think it means for God to do "immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine"?

One thing that's important to recognise when we think about God doing immeasurably more is to understand all aspects of this.

- We should be encouraged because it means that God is able - he CAN do it.
- However, there is also the reality that just because God CAN doesn't mean he does or will.

Ask: Can you think of a time when God did more than you expected him to do? *(Take some time to talk through some examples - have one of your own ready to tell personally or a story you know.)*

Ask: Can you think of a time when God did NOT come through the way you expected, either personally or from the Bible? *(You could have a personal story ready here to tell as well.)*

Perhaps it's easier to think of personal stories or stories from the Bible where Jesus showed up and did amazing, powerful things. But we also see stories where Jesus doesn't show up in expected ways, even though he could have.

Read Luke 7:18-23.

Ask: Why do you think John sent disciples to ask who Jesus was? Do you think he really didn't know? *John was the one who was preaching about Jesus in the beginning. Of course he knew who he was. John was in prison at that point and he was probably wondering why Jesus didn't come to rescue him.*

Ask: What do you think Jesus' response meant? *Jesus affirmed what John already knew, but he said that even though he was the Messiah, he wasn't coming to get John. And he said John would be blessed if he would still follow him even though Jesus wasn't going to take him out of that terrible situation.*

Ultimately, we know that God is able. Sometimes he uses that power to do far more than we could imagine. And sometimes even though he CAN he does not.

Ask: How does it affect your identity to know that God is able?

Ask: Why do you think it's important to understand that sometimes God doesn't always show up in the way we expect? *The key here is rooted in our identity. God has been clear about who we are in Christ. It is clear that we are loved and cherished by God. And it's important to have that deeply rooted in our hearts, because life doesn't always go the way we would like or plan and God doesn't always show up in the ways we expect him to. We must have a deep understanding of who God is so that we trust him. And we must have a deep understanding of who we are so we know we are still loved no matter what the circum-*

stances. Without that, when difficulty comes, as it will for us all, we will struggle not to fall away from Jesus.

In Ephesians 3:20, Paul says that the immeasurably more that God does, he does by the power of the Holy Spirit that is at work in us.

Ask: Can you remember anywhere previously in Ephesians where we learned about the power of the Holy Spirit at work in and through us? *Take a look at Ephesians 1:18-20.*

Ask: God is able to do so much through US by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us. How do you experience this power at work in you? *(Have some examples ready to help them to think about how we experience the Holy Spirit and/or how we know when it is the Holy Spirit at work. If you could use some help here, refer back to the homework in Study 7 where you looked at some characteristics of the Holy Spirit.)*

Ask: What could keep you from experiencing the Holy Spirit's power in your life? *(See 1 Thessalonians 5:19 and Ephesians 4:29-5:20) Using those verses, have a discussion around what it could mean to grieve or quench the Spirit in your life. Help them to see how sin can prevent us from experiencing the power of God in our lives the way we should.*

Ask: What can you do if you realise you're not experiencing the Holy Spirit's power in your life? How can you make a change? *(Look at Ephesians 5 again for some help in thinking about it.)*

Homework: Choose one area that you want to pray for God to do something immeasurably more. Another power challenge could be to encourage them now to disciple someone else if they aren't already, or to take someone through this Ephesians study.

Since this is the last week of the study, you can follow up depending on what the challenge was within the week or month. If they weren't able to do the love challenge, they can combine the power and love challenge.