

EPHESIANS

WHO I AM AND WHY IT MATTERS

Last week we began a new series in the book of Ephesians. This book, or letter, was written to a specific church during a particular time in history. It was instructional for the church in Ephesus, but it's also instructional for us. By looking at what the Holy Spirit was saying through Paul to this church, we can identify what God is saying to us today.

Scripture: Ephesians 1:15-23

Discussion Questions:

1. Looking back at your notes, what encouraged or challenged you the most?

Read Ephesians 1:15-16a.

2. Have you ever left a Yelp review? Are you more likely to leave negative or positive feedback? Why are we more likely to share negative feedback with someone rather than positive feedback?
3. We could all use more positive feedback. It's not likely that you've ever suffered from too much encouragement. What would it look like to model what we see Paul doing in these two verses?

Another good question for your small group: What percentage of your self-talk is negative or positive?

I would guess that most people's "self-talk" tends to be pessimistic, so we could all use some encouragement.

There are many things we could do to express gratitude to those in whom we see God's grace at work. We can simply tell them, "Thank you" for whatever has blessed you. We could take the time to send someone a handwritten note identifying what we've observed and thank them for it. It might even be a blessing to write a note, and then hand deliver it to them. Simply put, we need to be intentional when expressing gratitude. Let's make it our aim to resist keeping appreciation to ourselves. Let's not forget that the Devil aims to steal, kill, and destroy. He's actively working against those in whom we see things that encourage us. Let's oppose the schemes of the Devil by thanking those we appreciate.

Read Ephesians 1:16b-23.

4. In verses 15-16a, Paul identifies the positive and points it out to those in whom he sees it. What do we see Paul do next? Similarly, how often do you express your gratitude to God for someone? What keeps you from doing this?

After recognizing the strong faith and testimony of love in the lives of the Ephesian believers, Paul turns to God and thanks Him for the grace He has worked in their lives. Paul recognized something good; he praised them for it and then turned to God and thanked Him because He was the root cause of the grace that flowed from the Ephesian believers to Paul. Are you thanking God for the grace you see in others, the grace that encourages you when you observe it?

Remember, the Devil aims to steal, kill, and destroy. He's actively working against those in whom we see things that encourage us. Let's oppose the schemes of the Devil by thanking those we appreciate AND by thanking God for them.

5. Paul is an excellent example for us in many ways, especially prayer. Take a moment and identify from these verses what Paul prays for the Ephesian church. Why does he pray for such things?

Paul's prayer for the Ephesians was fueled by gratitude for the grace he observed at work in their lives. Beyond this gratitude, Paul prayed.

- Paul prayed for God to give the Ephesian believers spiritual wisdom and insight so that they would grow in their knowledge of God.
- Next, Paul prayed that this growing knowledge of God would flood their hearts with light that would strengthen their hope and confidence in God and His grace toward them.
- Finally, Paul prayed that these believers would understand the greatness of the power available to them in Christ – the same power that raised Him from the grave.
- In summary: God, give these believers insight into who You are → which will flood their hearts with hope → and fill their lives with the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Remember, the Devil aims to steal, kill, and destroy. He's actively working against those in whom we see things that encourage us. Let's oppose the schemes of the Devil by thanking those we appreciate, thanking God for them, and praying for God to continue to do more in them.

6. What would it mean to know someone is praying for you as Paul prayed for the Ephesians? What keeps us from being faithful intercessors? What steps could you take to begin praying regularly and specifically for others?

To become a more faithful intercessor, you must become a more faithful prayer warrior; one isn't likely to come before the other. In short, we have a prayer problem. We must discipline ourselves to carve out more space in our lives to become people of constant prayer. We won't accidentally drift toward a deep and faithful prayer life – we must discipline ourselves to get there. Once we're committed to the daily habit of prayer, we can make it our aim to become faithful intercessors. The most practical thing we can do to become regular and specific intercessors is to keep a prayer list. As often as we see Paul say that he "always thanks God for..." in his New Testament writings, it seems he kept a list. His list

would have included the Ephesians, Philippians, Corinthians, Thessalonians, etc.

7. What's the difference between a powerful and powerless Christian life? How do we tap into the power available to us in Christ?

The difference between a powerful and powerless Christian life can be summed up in one word: hurry. Our lives are so full of “things to do” and “places to rush off to” that we do not spend time investing in and cultivating our relationship with God. We’re rarely “present” with Jesus, given the schedules most of us keep, so why would we expect to experience the power that comes from an intimate relationship with Him if we’re not making adequate time with Him?

How do we tap into the power available to us in Christ? In short, we access it through the spiritual disciplines which connect our hearts to God and His Word.

Author John Mark Comer, in his book *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, writes, “A discipline is a way to access power. A spiritual discipline is similar but different. It’s similar in that it’s ‘an activity I can do by direct effort that will eventually enable me to do that which, currently, I cannot do by direct effort.’ It’s a way to access power. But it’s different in that not only are you exercising your own capacity to do the right thing (what we call willpower), but you are also opening yourself up to a power far beyond your own—that of the Holy Spirit. You are creating time and space to access God himself at the deepest level of your being. Here’s Dallas Willard’s definition of spiritual disciplines: ‘The disciplines are activities of mind and body purposefully undertaken, to bring our personality and total being into effective cooperation with the divine order. They enable us more and more to live in a power that is, strictly speaking, beyond us, deriving from the spiritual itself.’ Willpower isn’t bad; in fact, the recovery of our willpower is central to transformation. When willpower works, it works great. It just doesn’t normally get you very far. Especially early on in your journey with Jesus. That’s the rub. But through practices — ordinary, easy, and, in my opinion, life-giving — grounded in the life of Jesus, we gain access to a life-power far beyond our own.”

8. What's one personal takeaway from today's study you can focus on applying in your life this week?