



Brought Near **TO BE** Built Up

CHOSEN IN LOVE

Gather

AS YOU BEGIN, PRAY TOGETHER.

ICEBREAKER QUESTION.

If you were the first choice in a professional sports draft, what sport or skill would you be chosen for? (It can be a real sport or a hidden talent you have!)

READ GOD'S HOLY WORD.

Ephesians 1:1-6 (read vv.1-14 for context)

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:

² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, ⁹ he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

¹¹ In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

Scripture Reflection

Paul begins his letter in eternity. Before there was failure to regret or faithfulness to celebrate, we were chosen in Christ. Election is not a speculative doctrine meant to divide; it is pastoral assurance meant to steady. In a culture that tells us we are what we achieve, accumulate, or curate, Paul announces that our identity is received, not constructed. Adoption means we are not spiritual freelancers but beloved sons and daughters. Holiness flows from belonging; it is not the precondition for it. If we misunderstand this opening movement, everything that follows will feel like pressure. But if we receive it, obedience becomes response rather than self-salvation.

Opening the Word

WE RETURN TO THE SCRIPTURES AS GOD'S LIVING WORD TO US TODAY.

- Does anything stand out or surprise you from the passage?
- What are some of the “spiritual blessings in Christ” the Father has blessed us with that Paul mentions in this passage (v.3)?
- When did God choose His people (v.4)? Why (vv.4-6)?
- According to v.5, followers of Jesus have been adopted into God’s family. In Roman culture, adoption came with both rights and responsibilities. What’s an example of each Paul names here?
- Based on this passage, is holiness the cause for our being accepted or our response to having been chosen? Why does it matter?

Quotation

PAUSE TO REFLECT ON THIS IDEA.

“Becoming the Beloved means letting the truth of our Belovedness become enfolded in everything we think, say or do.”

Henri Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World*

Responding to the Word

WHAT IS THE SPIRIT SAYING TO US THROUGH THE WORD?

- This scripture gets at the heart of our struggle for assurance and meaning: how do we know we're "enough"? Where would you say our culture forms us to look for our "enoughness"? (How about any of these: career promotions, parenting success, financial stability, beauty?) If you're willing to share, what's one place you're tempted to look for your value and "enoughness"?
- Instead, Paul tells us to find our identity in God's having chosen and adopted us in Christ. If this truth sunk deep into your heart, how would that radically change your life?
 - If you really believed you already possessed "every spiritual blessing in Christ" and had been chosen "before the creation of the world," what would you stop doing or devoting so much time and energy to?
 - How would the way you approach God change? When we look for our "enoughness" in what we have done, we will always approach God either with worry and shame because of our shortcomings or pride and arrogance in our false perception of our goodness. But when we trust that we're chosen "in love" rather than on what we've achieved, we can come both humbly and boldly to God.
 - How would the way you face trials and suffering change? Consider how the identity that you receive in Christ is more resilient than an identity you try to forge through your own efforts. What difference would this make in seasons when we feel weak or go through suffering?
 - How would your practice of spiritual disciplines change? In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructs His disciples to practice things like giving, praying, and fasting (Matt. 6:1-18). Yet Jesus warns His disciples not to practice these like the Pharisees. How might understanding Paul's teaching that holiness should come as a response to being adopted (rather than vice-versa) keep us from using spiritual practices as a form of works-righteousness?

Invitations & Challenges

HERE ARE A FEW WAYS THE SPIRIT MIGHT BE INVITING OR CHALLENGING US TO RESPOND THIS COMING WEEK.

- Look up Pastor Timothy Keller's Gospel v. Religion chart linked in the "Go Deeper" resources. Keller contrasts "religion" (which he uses as a catch-all term for any system of belief where you act as your own savior) and the gospel. In what areas are you operating from a need to achieve your own enoughness ("religion")? In what areas do you see the Gospel renewing your identity?
- If you have yet to put your trust in Jesus, how might this passage challenge what you think it means to be a Christian? Have you understood Christianity to be "spiritual blessings," like going to heaven when you die, that you earn through being a good person? Have you ever known a Christian who came across as superior to others? How might your understanding be challenged by Paul's message that a Christian is someone loved by God and adopted by sheer grace in Christ?
- Practice of Jesus: Put aside time each day to praise God! Paul opens Ephesians with this song of worship. He praises God who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ. This week, praise God for who He is and His many blessings to you, both those you've uniquely received in your life as well as those we all share in Jesus. Find a time that helps you make it a habit: maybe right when you wake up, during your commute, or as a family during dinner.

Pray

THANK OUR HEAVENLY FATHER FOR HIS GRACE AND FAITHFULNESS AND ASK THE HOLY SPIRIT TO EMPOWER YOU TO FOLLOW JESUS THIS WEEK.

Heavenly Father, we praise You for Your generous will, that from before the creation of the world, You predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ. We are in awe of Your love and grace. Holy Spirit, as sons and daughters of the King, make us holy and blameless like Jesus. Would our thoughts, words, and actions reflect the One who loves us and bring You glory. Help us this week to let our Belovedness shape everything we think, say, and do. Amen.

Songs

THIS WEEK, TAKE SOME TIME AS A GROUP OR ON YOUR OWN TO DWELL ON THE TRUTHS OF THE GOSPEL THROUGH SINGING OR LISTENING.

[Yet Not I But Through Christ In Me – CityAlight](#)

[Reckless Love – Cory Asbury](#)

[Behold What Manner of Love – The Maranatha Singers](#)

Daily Scripture Meditation

THEMATIC READINGS TO AID IN REFLECTING ON THE TRUTHS DISCUSSED TODAY WITH THE LORD THROUGHOUT THE WEEK.

Mon, Apr 13 | Genesis 12:1-9

Tue, Apr 14 | Romans 9

Wed, Apr 15 | Deuteronomy 7:6-8

Thu, Apr 16 | Psalm 89 (esp. vv.19-29)

Fri, Apr 17 | Mark 1:9-11

Sat, Apr 18 | Romans 8

Going Deeper

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO EXPLORE THE TEXT AND IDEAS FROM TODAY.

[Gospel v. Religion by Timothy Keller](#) – A chart contrasting an achieved and received identity.

[Ephesians Overview by The Bible Project](#) – A short video situating and summarizing the meaning of the letter.

[Seculosity by David Zahl](#) – A book exploring how our modern pursuit of “enoughness” is a sign that our culture is *more* religious than ever.