



Session 1

OPEN

What would make you feel rich? Who comes to mind when you think of the richest person you know personally?

STUDY

Read Ephesians 1:1-14.

1. Make a list of all the blessings Paul says God has given believers.
2. Given your present circumstances, which of these blessings means the most to you? Why?
3. Paul refers to these blessings as riches. To him there is nothing more valuable in life. Why does Paul elevate these blessings above any other thing we might value in our lives? In what ways might your attitudes, choices and actions not show that you value these blessings above other things?
4. Verses 1:9-10 are the key verses of the book of Ephesians. Everything Paul writes about in this letter relates to these verses. What does Paul say is the “mystery of God’s will?”

Interpretive Note:

Paul calls it a “mystery” because God’s plan for the world was hinted at but largely unknown until Jesus’ incarnation, death and resurrection. Now, after Christ, Paul is able to look back and see the big picture of what God has been doing. He can trace God’s plan from the covenant with Abraham, to the exodus and covenant with Moses, the building of the kingdom of Israel, the ultimate failure of that kingdom, and the messages of the prophets. He sees how it all leads to Jesus and recognizes that God’s plan is finally accomplished through Jesus. After recognizing God’s incredible plan, Paul barely notices he is in prison because he’s beside himself with excitement and bursting to share that excitement with us.

5. God's will and incredible plan is to unite all things under Jesus Christ. What implications does this plan have regarding how you think about and relate to others in your family, neighborhood, work and church?

6. In verses 7-8, what did Jesus do to accomplish God's plan? What does this teach us about the methods God wants us to use to accomplish His plan?

7. In verses 1:13-14, what does it mean to be "sealed" by the Holy Spirit? What are the benefits of this in your life? How does it connect to God's plan to unite all things under Christ?

PRAYER

How can the things you have just discovered from Ephesians 1:1-14 be turned into a prayer?

Spend some time praying for each other's prayer requests and include the ideas you just shared in the question above.

DAILY DEVOTIONS

There is immense value in soaking yourself in scripture every day. Spending even ten minutes a day with these suggested devotions will greatly enrich your life and group experience. God will transform you from within as you engage with the power of God's "living and active" word.

In these devotions you will use simple, but effective methods for engaging scripture. This week you will cover the verses you have just studied as well as the verses for the next session. Moving forward, your daily devotions will cover the verses for the upcoming session so you'll be ready for a rich time of discovery, sharing and application when your group gathers.

A Simple Daily Devotional Process

1. Pray for God's enlightenment before you start to read the scripture passage.
2. Read the assigned passage and observe how the scripture passage is describing different themes. Record your observations using the chart found on the following pages.
3. Respond using the Reflection questions and the 4C questions below. Depending on the passage, you may not have an answer to all four questions.

CELEBRATE: What can you praise God for from this passage?

CONFESS: Are you convicted of something you need to confess to God?

COMMIT: What commitment does this passage challenge you to make?

COMMUNICATE: What did you learn that you could share with someone?

This Week's Devotions

- Day 1 Read Ephesians 1:1-8. Reflection: From the list of things God has given believers, which do you truly treasure and which do you give little thought about? Why? From these verses, fill out what you can using the chart on the next page and then answer the 4C questions.
- Day 2 Read Ephesians 1:9-10. Reflection: How much does your attitudes and relationships towards others reflect your active participation in God's plan? Now, fill out what you can using the chart on the next page and answer the 4C questions.
- Day 3 Read Ephesians 1:11-14. Reflection: How does the Holy Spirit act as a deposit? How much do you notice the work of the Holy Spirit in your life? Fill out what you can using the chart on the next page and answer the 4C questions.
- Day 4 Read Ephesians 1:15-17. Reflection: Paul starts by saying "For this reason." What is the reason Paul is referring to? What does Paul do because of that reason? How often do you pray for what Paul prays for you? Fill out what you can using the chart on the next page and answer the 4C questions.
- Day 5 Read Ephesians 1:15-19. Reflection: What additional things does Paul pray for and what difference will it make if you gain these things? Fill out what you can using the chart on the next page and answer the 4C questions.
- Day 6 Read Ephesians 1:19-23. Reflection: What point does Paul want to make by his description of Jesus? How does that description make a difference in your life? Fill out what you can using the chart and answer the 4C questions.
- Day 7 Read Ephesians 1 and look over what you have written on the chart. What is the big lesson of chapter 1 for you? Now, answer the 4C questions.

Observations

Every passage you will study in your daily devotions will describe one or more of the topics below. In the space provided, write down what you observe along with the chapter and verse citation. By the time you finish you will have developed a deeper understanding of each of these areas.

Each day ask, "How did this passage describe...?"

Note: each passage will have a description for one or more of these topics, but probably not all of the topics will be covered in any given passage.

GOD (Father)

JESUS (Son)

HOLY SPIRIT

HUMANITY (before and after salvation)

LIFESTYLE and BEHAVIOR

Incredible...The Book of Ephesians
LEADER Guide
Session 1

LEADER'S NOTE

The answers shared below are suggestions to help you as a leader guide the conversation. **DO NOT just read the answers verbatim.** Instead ask the questions, one at a time, and then leave it open for group members to share their thoughts.

It is always better for people to discover answers through the conversation than to be told an answer by the leader. Adults learn better when they discover answers for themselves, rather than being told. Their answers also may also be better than the answers suggested below. If points made in the answers below do not come up in the discussion, then you can offer them as an additional insight before moving on to the next question.

Managing Time: Don't rush a discussion, or close it off prematurely because you want to finish all the questions. If a discussion over a question is particularly rich and beneficial, let it continue, it is a sign that God is working in the group through that question. Read the study ahead of time and make decisions about which questions you think will be the most valuable for your group to discuss so that if you are running out of time, you will have an idea of what questions to skip over. **ALWAYS LEAVE TIME FOR PRAYER.** Prayer is just as important as the Bible study and can powerfully minister to people in your group who are in need of God's action. At least 15 minutes should be left for sharing requests and praying.

OPEN

What would make you feel rich? Who comes to mind when you think of the richest person you know personally?

In Ephesians 1, Paul tells us about the riches of God's spiritual blessings that are available to us. This question is a fun way to warm up to the theme of riches.

STUDY

Read Ephesians 1:1-14.

1. *Make a list of all the blessings Paul says God has given believers.*

Chose us to be holy and blameless
Adopted us as God's children through Jesus
Freely given us grace in Jesus which God lavished on us
We have redemption and forgiveness of sins
Made known the mystery of His will to bring all things together under Christ
Sealed with the Holy Spirit

2. *Given your present circumstances, which of these blessings means the most to you? Why?*

This question is meant to be an opportunity for people to think about and make a personal connection to the treasure chest of blessings we are receiving through our faith.

3. *Paul refers to these blessings as riches. To him there is nothing more valuable in life. Why does Paul elevate these blessings above any other thing we might value in our lives? In what ways might your attitudes, choices and actions not show that you value these blessings above other things?*

These blessings are about things that really matter and matter for eternity. We often value things that are shiny and may provide moments of pleasure but have little lasting value, they rust, corrode, wear out or just get boring. Sometimes, we put our value in relationships and that's a significant step up, but relationships can be fragile as well and the best of them are not eternal. Only God is eternal and our relationship with Him is the only thing that has lasting and eternal value. Settling for anything less is like choosing to stay at the Roach Motel when you own the Ritz Carlton.

We show that we do not value the riches of God's spiritual blessings when we put more effort into gaining something of temporary value over building our relationship with Christ, when we fail to follow the guidance of God, when we lack generosity or compassion, when we are critical or short-tempered, or when we choose to cheat and lie to gain an advantage.

4. *Verses 1:9-10 are the key verses of the book of Ephesians. Everything Paul writes about in this letter relates to these verses. What does Paul say is the "mystery of God's will?"*

Although this is a simple question, this verse is so central to understanding the book of Ephesians it is important that everyone recognizes it: Paul says that the mystery of God's will is "to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ." Ask your group what this means to them.

Point to the information box to learn why Paul calls this a mystery.

5. *God's will and incredible plan is to unite all things under Jesus Christ. What implications does this plan have regarding how you think about and relate to others in your family, neighborhood, work and church?*

It is impossible to overemphasize that God's will is to unite all things under Christ and that the ultimate purpose of Jesus coming to earth and dying on the cross is to reunite a world that was broken in the Garden of Eden. **This is God's will!** Do we share that desire? Are we allowing ourselves to be used by God as part of his global work, or are our attitudes and actions working against God's work, even if we are doing so unintentionally?

The implications of God's great plan for our own lives means seeking to develop attitudes of love and compassion for others, even our enemies. It means to be actively seeking to reconcile and bring unity to our relationships in every area of our lives. It means remembering that division and divisiveness actively opposes the will of God (and do you really want to oppose God?). In some relationships unity will be easy, but with others, this will be extremely difficult; in fact it will likely take a miracle. Fortunately, we have miraculous power available, which Paul tells us about at the end of chapter one that will be covered in the next session.

6. *In verses 7-8, what did Jesus do to accomplish God's plan? What does this teach us about the methods God wants us to use to accomplish His plan?*

God's plan was accomplished through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for our forgiveness. This point cannot be missed. God does not accomplish His plan through force and might, but through sacrifice and forgiveness. It is through forgiveness that God is bringing all things back together. This means that, as God's followers, God wants us to use forgiveness and sacrifice for the sake of others to accomplish his plan. What appears like weakness and defeat in the world's eyes is actually God's greatest power at work through us (no wonder Satan makes it look like a weakness). Again, this is not something easy for us to do on our own; it will take God's power working in us which is where the end of Ephesians 1 will take us.

7. *In verses 1:13-14, what does it mean to be “sealed” by the Holy Spirit? What are the benefits of this in your life? How does it connect to God’s plan to unite all things under Christ?*

In Roman times, a message was often sealed with wax and stamped with a signet ring to guarantee the authenticity of the message. What Paul is saying is that the Holy Spirit serves the same purpose. Our experience of God’s presence through the Holy Spirit guarantees the authenticity and truth of the message of being blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ. The experience of the Holy Spirit assures us of our redemption, forgiveness, part in God’s plan and the power available to us through Jesus. Paul uses the term “deposit” to communicate the same message. The presence and work of the Holy Spirit in our lives acts as a deposit, guaranteeing our eternal salvation yet to come. The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives brings to us Jesus’ resurrection power used to transform our lives and accomplish God’s incredible plan.

PRAYER

How can the things you have just discovered from Ephesians 1:1-14 be turned into a prayer?

Scripture is our rich resource for prayer. Scripture can inspire prayers of worship and thanksgiving and give us ideas on what to be praying about. Some ideas for turning this into prayer would include:

- Thanks for these incredible blessings
- Greater ability to recognize and appreciate these blessings
- Greater appreciation for the sacrifice Christ made on our behalf
- Greater recognition of the Holy Spirit’s presence in us
- Confession of ways we have caused division
- Greater willingness to sacrifice for and forgive others
- Specific situations and relationships that need unity

Spend some time praying for each other’s prayer requests and include the ideas you just shared in the question above.