

In Christ
Ephesians 1
Small Group Discussion Guide

Opening Question (get everyone involved in discussion):

- How do you feel about the start of the New Year? Do you have any New Years traditions? Do you make resolutions?
- What did Josh mean on Sunday by the term, “empty optimism?” If you weren’t present, what do you think the term means?
- Transition: As we begin our look at Ephesians, we’re going to see why we can have a more grounded sense of optimism.

Ephesians background: Ephesians is one of the letters that Paul wrote from a Roman prison. He had spent three years in the city of Ephesus during one of his missionary journeys, helping to get the church established there. But it seems that he’s writing this letter to the new believers in the surrounding province of Asia. He probably intended this letter to be passed around from church to church. The recipients are Gentile believers—people who don’t have a Jewish heritage—and Paul is writing to open their eyes to all that they have received in Jesus.

Read Ephesians 1:3-14 and then discuss the following.

- When you first read v. 3—either Sunday or today—what was your initial reaction? Did you share in Paul’s exuberance? Were you confused? Elaborate.
 - One phrase in this verse that we didn’t discuss much yet is, “In the heavenly realms.” What do you think it means in this context? (We will look into it more in next week’s sermon as well).
 - “Every spiritual blessing” refers to all that Paul is about to describe, in vv. 4-14. Let’s look closer at each of those.
- Before looking at your sermon notes, try to remember—or to identify in the passage—the five “spiritual blessings” that Paul describes here. As you name each one, try to give a simple definition or description. (Leaders, they are printed below for your reference. See if your group can come up with all of them on their own, even if the words are not exactly the same). Each one has a follow-up question for application as well.
 - 1. God sees you as perfect (v. 4, holy and blameless)**
 - How does the recognition of the way that God sees you help with your actual behavior and character now?
 - 2. God has adopted you as his son (v. 5)**
 - How does this adoption give you the security and identity to live with confidence and grounded optimism?
 - 3. God has redeemed you (v. 7)**
 - What bearing does your redemption have on how you live today? What accomplished this redemption for you?

4. God has let you in on his grand scheme (vv. 8-10)

- What is God's grand scheme, as described here?
- New Testament commentator F.F. Bruce calls this ultimate plan, "to gather up the fragmented and alienated universe," speaking of the phrase, "bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth." How do you feel about this idea?
- In what way can being let in on this grand scheme affect how you approach life today?

5. God has given us a guarantee of our future (vv. 13-14)

- What aspects of our promised future do you most long for?
- When are you tempted to despair about whether God will make good on his promises?
- What "deposit" does Paul tell us we can consider a guarantee of our future? Does this awareness make any difference for you?
- Of the five spiritual blessings above, which one seems most pertinent to you at this moment? Did one or more of them touch you deeply?
- Is there one or more of these spiritual blessings that you feel you haven't really taken hold of yet?
- All of these spiritual blessings are said to be our if we are "in Christ." How many times do you see that phrase, or something similar (such as "in him") show up in these verses?
 - What does "In Christ" mean?
 - What two events are necessary for someone to become "in Christ?" (v. 13)

Read vv. 17-20 and discuss the following.

- Paul concludes this section by explaining how practical the knowledge of these spiritual blessings can be. As your eyes are opened to all that you have in Christ, what is the result in your life?
- What is meant by the phrase, "the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people?"
 - Pastor Josh's explanation: "Our inheritance is in Christ. That's where our greatest treasure is found. But *God's* glorious inheritance is where? In his holy people. In you and me and people from every nation. God has said, "You're the one I want forever and ever, my inheritance, my treasure!" What does that give you? Worth.
- What are some ways that you can enjoy, and reap the benefits of, this eye-opening passage?

Prayer:

- Pray for one another, like Paul did, that "the eyes of your heart will be enlightened."
- What other needs exist in your group? Spend some time praying for them.