

WEEK 5

MADE **ALIVE**

The Book of Ephesians



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WEEK 5
FEBRUARY 5, 2024



CHURCH IN THE SQUARE

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EVERY DAY ...

... A **PASSAGE** TO READ,
... SOME **COMMENTS** TO CONSIDER,
... THREE **QUESTIONS** TO ASK,
... A **PRAYER** TO PRAY.



WEEK 5

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DAY 1

PRISONERS OF CHRIST

First read Ephesians 3:1-3.

Paul's in prison. While he's a bit self-conscious (notice how much he talks about himself in this passage), he wants to explain the nature and purpose of his imprisonment. He sees himself neither as an enemy of the State nor a victim. Instead, he's **“a prisoner of Christ Jesus”** (v.1). In other words, Paul understands his bondage as part of God's will. God entrusted Paul with **“the mystery”** of Gentile inclusion in salvation (v.3, see also v.6). This liberality of his gospel message sparked significant oppression from his Jewish detractors—they threw him in jail.

Beyond his immediate and literal imprisonment, Paul communicates a uniquely Christian identity—we're all prisoners of Christ.

Paradoxically, Christian liberty is a new kind of bondage. We've been **“set free from sin, [and] become slaves of righteousness”** (Romans 6:18). The yoke of sin destroys us with its crushing burdens of self-reliance, dissatisfaction, and earthly ambition. In our weariness, Jesus invites us to **“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”** (Matthew 11:29-30).

Prisoners of sin are crushed. Prisoners of Christ find rest.

Rest is secured for believers on the cross. We're told in his death that Jesus destroys what destroys us (see Colossians 2:15). You see, his death undoes the power of sin's grip and frees our hearts to be joined with his. We find rest as prisoners of Christ.



DAY 1
PRISONERS OF
CHRIST

1. Why do you think God wants you to be righteous (rather than free to do as you please)?
2. What sin do you feel bound to right now? How does the gospel give you hope?
3. How has Jesus destroyed what's destroying you?

Heavenly Father ...

*Help me to walk in freedom--bound to
righteousness.*

In Jesus' Name, Amen.



DAY 2

SAME
BODY

First read Ephesians 3:4-6.

For generations, Israel was God's special people. God chose Abraham to become **"a great nation"** (Genesis 12:2). Through his relationship with Israel, God broadcasted his nature and character to the world. Divine blessings of favor, land, deliverance, and salvation were promised exclusively to Israel. That is, until Jesus. That's the secret now being told. The revealed mystery is **"that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel"** (v.6). Non-Jewish people (every other nation) are now part of the same spiritual family as the Jewish people. While this revelation was astonishing to Paul's first readers, we might wonder why it was a secret in the first place.

God was always clear about his intentions. In the nation's infancy, they're reminded that they're **"a people holy to the Lord"** and chosen **"because the Lord loves you"** (Deuteronomy 7:6,8). God's choice of Israel wasn't about glorying one people over the rest, but rather as a means to make God's holiness and love known to everyone. His persistent mercy despite his people's rebellion and brokenness whispers the grace his Son now embodies. When the mystery is revealed, God isn't now deciding to change his mind and let more people in his family. Instead, he fulfills his age-old promise to Abraham to bless **"all the families of the earth"** through Israel (Genesis 12:3).



DAY 2

SAME BODY

1. What do God's promises reveal about his character?
2. How should the gospel's inclusion of all nations shape how we see God and people?
3. Why was Jesus' death necessary to include Jews and Gentiles into God's family (see 2:14-16)?

Heavenly Father ...

Your love welcomes the least, last, and the lost. Your grace is sufficient for the native, the refugee, the sojourner, and those with nowhere to call home. Help me to rest as a member of your family. Help me see and welcome others through your merciful affection.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.



DAY 3

POWER IS TRICKY

First read Ephesians 3:7.

Power is tricky. Likely, when we think about power, we think about physical strength or social authority. While both have positive attributes, each has a destructive allure. An over-appreciation for physical strength leads to brutishness and, perhaps, even a lack of wisdom—all brawn, no brains. An exaggerated love for social authority causes us to wield it solely to protect the powerful, often to the detriment of the vulnerable. Our “capacity for meaningful action” corrupts us rather than strengthens everyone (*Strong and Weak*, 35).

Paul’s ministry paints a different portrait of power. You see, it was **“according to the gift of God’s grace”** that divine power worked through the apostle (v.7). Power was a gift of grace. God fills his people with power because, despite our physical strength and social authority, we’re all weak. That’s why power is tricky. Our earthly powers often cover our spiritual weakness. We feel less vulnerable when we have more money or muscles than others. But our real battles are never fought with bank accounts and gym memberships. We’re up against **“the cosmic powers over this present darkness”** (6:12a). These invisible forces have convinced us to trust in our possessions and psyche to keep us safe.

No matter how strong our bodies are and how much cultural capital we possess, only **“the power of Christ”** brings wholeness amidst spiritual weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). Jesus’ power is of a different order. He didn’t have many possessions (see Matthew 8:20). Few people found him physically attractive (see Isaiah 53:2). In an earthly sense, he was weak. Yet he’s the only one who could defeat **“the spiritual forces of evil”** (6:12b).

Jesus’ power works in us like it did in Paul—through grace and weakness. We embrace the joy of spiritual flourishing by releasing the need to win the race of earthly power.



DAY 3

POWER IS TRICKY

1. How would you describe God's power?
2. How is God's vision and embodiment of power different than yours?
3. How does the gospel empower you to live like Jesus today?

Heavenly Father ...

By your grace, empower me to walk in weakness today.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.



DAY 4

CHURCH IS A PEOPLE

First read Ephesians 3:8-10.

Theologian Marva Dawn quips, "To say 'I'm going to church' both reveals and promotes bad theology" (*Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, x). While we don't want to be legalistic with our words, we do want to be precise with our thinking. The Church is not a place. The Church is a people. We're a diverse group who **"are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise"** (v.6). When we shrink the meaning of church to a building or a weekly event, we miss our very nature and purpose.

Jesus promised his identity—*the Son of the Living God*—would be the "rock" on which his *ekklesia* would be built (see Matthew 16:13). That word, *ekklesia* (church), literally means "the called out ones." First and foremost, we've been called out by the Heavenly Father for a relationship with him. We are his people (see 1 Peter 2:10). But we've also been set apart to accomplish his will. Specifically, as a community, we're meant to **"bring to light ... the manifold wisdom of God"** (v.10a). Our very existence as a multiethnic people demonstrates God's nature and character. And when we **"dwell in unity,"** we tell the truth about him to our neighbors across the hall and our neighbors in **"the heavenly places"** (Psalm 133:1 and v.10b).

When we embrace Church as a people, we accomplish God's purposes.



DAY 4
CHURCH IS A
PEOPLE

1. How does the nature of the Church reveal the nature of God?
2. How would your church live differently if they saw the Church as a people, not just as a building or event?
3. Why was Jesus' death necessary to start the Church? How are we built on his identity?

Heavenly Father ...

Empower your people to be the Church today. In my home. In my city. Throughout the world.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.



DAY 5

ETERNAL PURPOSES

First read Ephesians 3:11-13.

The Church was never a backup plan. God always intended to make himself known through his people, announcing the “many-splendoured wisdom” through the Church **“according to [his] eternal purpose”** (v.10,11 and *O’Brien*, 248).

Salvation wasn’t a second option.
The incarnation wasn’t Plan B.
The cross wasn’t an afterthought.

God **“realized in Christ Jesus our Lord”** precisely what he intended before the foundation of the world (v.11).

Theologians call this “the redemptive covenant.” Before creation, before time ... the Father, Son, and Spirit confirmed the plan of history. Paul records this covenant most succinctly in Philippians 2, telling us that Christ was **“obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”** (Philippians 2:8). Jesus submitted himself to this plan—from start to finish. Therefore, the Father highly exalted the Son in and through the Church.

God's providence through history gives us boldness, confidence, and faith in our own suffering (v.12). So Paul's encouragement **“not to lose heart”** isn’t some empty well-wishing (v.13). He’s grounding the Church in God’s historic power and love so that his purposes continue to be accomplished in and through us.



DAY 5

ETERNAL PURPOSES

1. What does “the redemptive covenant” teach us about God’s love and power?
2. How does this passage encourage you today?
3. How does Jesus' endurance through suffering help us endure suffering?

Heavenly Father ...

Help me not to lose heart today.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.



FAMILY GUIDE

CONVERSATIONS STARTERS

DAY 1

Ephesians 3:1

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles

We are all “prisoners” of Christ.

What’s a prisoner? What do you think it means to be a prisoner of Christ?

DAY 2

Ephesians 3:6

This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

We are one big family.

How are all followers of Jesus like a family?

DAY 3

Ephesians 3:7

Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power.

Jesus makes us powerful.

How does Jesus make us powerful? How is Jesus’ power different from the world’s power?

MADE ALIVE

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To receive updates about this reading guide and discover more gospel resources to help you enjoy the truth and beauty of Jesus, please visit churchinthesquare.com.





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