

Ephesians 1 - The Grace Giver



Introduction

It was 1995. I am newly engaged to Chad and we are driving in a light blue Plymouth Reliant, which was not very reliant. We are going to visit his family for the New Year and celebrate a belated Christmas. And I am nervous. I am so nervous! I had met his parents, Bonnie and Lorenz, before. We had gone out to dinner with them a couple of times when they came to visit Chad at college. Now, we are engaged, so this time it feels different. These people are going to be my in-laws

and I want them to like me.

Maybe I shouldn't worry. I should try to relax and just embrace the moment. But, I can't.

As we drive, I begin to plan ways I can be extra nice. I think about how sweet I will be. How complementary I will be. I run through little scenarios in my brain. I am determined to make them love me. By the time the Reliant pulls into the driveway, I am ready to make a great impression on them.

Things are going really well. The next morning, we sit down with Chad's whole family, his parents, his two brothers, and two sisters-in-law. It is a grand gift opening, full of laughter and love, jokes and jests. I learn about family traditions such as the "fake-out" box, gifts that were placed in boxes they did not match. I discover that my mother-in-law has been asking for a leather jacket for "years." I feel the warmth and joy this family shares. I feel honored to be sharing this sacred moment with them.

And then, a box is passed my way and I freeze. I am surprised, thrilled, and so embarrassed. I haven't brought anything. There is no box with a gift tag "For Bonnie, From Me." There is not even a card that says a goofy funny card phrase. Nothing! How could I have planned so poorly? I could feel the red warmth of embarrassment creep up my neck as I smiled at everyone.

And then, I open the gift.

A 1995 wonder! It is a denim dress with a full skirt and a white lace collar! This is a top tier dress. I mean, the shoulder pads, the shoulder pads are so powerful they could double as a flotation device. The tight band at the waist only serves to make the shoulder pads seem wider. The deep blue skirt falls as I hold the dress up, swinging long and full past my knees. It is the height of teacher fashion. It is perfect.

That is not my only gift that day. I am lavished in love. Graced with gifts! I am showered with the same love my in-laws showered on their own kids. I am a part of the family!

When you open Ephesians 1, it's like stepping under a waterfall of grace.

From the very first verses, Paul is pointing us to a God who gives—and gives *generously*.

God **blessed** us.

He **chose** us.

He **predestined** us.

He **lavished** grace and wisdom on us.

(Lavished. Not sprinkled. Not rationed. Lavished—like a closet overflowing with jean dresses.)

God is the **Grace Giver**—and Paul wants us to see that right away.

Now, this letter was originally written to the church in Ephesus—a young group of believers from all sorts of backgrounds: Jews, Gentiles, rich, and poor. It was a beautiful, messy, blended family of faith.

Because the Bible is alive and active, Paul's words weren't *just* for them. They're for us, too. Right here. Right now.

Ephesians begins by exploring our relationship with God (chapters 1–3). Paul kicks it off with worship—blessing and praising God, laying out all that He's done for us. He wants us to deeply know the power, purpose, and grace of God. God's grace is like a waterfall. It pours continually, relentlessly refreshing us, drenching us in His love and mercy.

Then, in chapters 4–6, the focus shifts. Paul starts talking about *how* we live this grace out—in real relationships, with real people. The idea is simple but profound: When God's grace fills you, it spills over into your family, your coworkers, your neighbors, your friends, your social media posts, and carpool convos. All of it.

As you jump into this study, here's my prayer for you:

May you know—truly know—that God is with you, not just in theory, but in your everyday reality.

May you find security, knowing you are a part of God's family. And He's got some amazing gifts for you!

May you feel and understand His grace soaking into every corner of your life.

And may that grace not stop with you—but flow through you, reaching everyone around you.

Let's dive in. Let's get drenched.

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Day 1 - Where Do I Start?

“How are you?”

“Fine.” The tension behind the voice is a tightly pulled thread about to snap. “Fine” was spoken through a tight chest, in a controlled tone, with a forced smile and a heart holding back the emotion.

“Are you really fine?”

A slow release of air let me know that my intuition is right. Things are not fine. “Where do I start?”

Time with the Lord is like a phone call with our best friend. We bring every facet of our lives to the table when we come to the Lord. We bring all the joys and glories. We bring all the hurts and the shame. In our search for grace, you may be asking where do I start? Where am I supposed to begin in my search for grace in my life?

In Ephesians, Paul begins in the same way that we begin a conversation with a friend. He opens the letter to the Ephesians with a welcoming heart and a position of understanding. It's like he is making a phone call and saying “Hi, It's me. I know you, friend.”

Read Ephesians 1:1-2. Who does Paul say he is? Why might that be important?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:27-13:1. How does an apostle relate to the body of Christ? What does an apostle do? What should an apostle not do?

Read Ephesians 4:11-12. What else does an apostle do?

“Apostle” means “one who is sent.” The most significant thing about an apostle is not the messenger themselves, but the one who sends them. The authority and weight of the apostle's message depend entirely on the sender. For example, if the Secretary of State came up to you and said, “The president wants to see you,” you might take that seriously. What if I said the same thing? You might just laugh. The power isn't in the messenger — it's in the sender.

Paul makes this clear. According to Ephesians 1:1, who does Paul represent? Who is sending Paul to share this message?

How does Paul describe the Ephesians? What does this tell you about them?

Because the Word of God is alive and active and always working, Ephesians 1:1 tells us something about ourselves. What does this tell you about the way God sees you in Christ?

Before Paul begins to listen or share, he reminds the Ephesians about who they are. What does he say in Ephesians 1:4?

In Christ, they are holy, set apart for God's purpose. You might not think of yourself as holy very often, and they probably didn't either. Maybe that is why Paul says it right away. He wants them to start with the right framework. God wants us to start with the right framework, too.

How does Colossians 1:22 echo this idea?

What greeting does he offer them in Ephesians 1:2?

Ten of Paul's thirteen letters begin this way! "Peace to you" or "peace be multiplied to you" was a traditional greeting for Jewish people at that time. Maybe Paul adds "grace" as a reminder of God's relationship with his people. The word is the same one used by the angel who greeted Mary (Panning 1997, 128). What words were used when the angel greeted Mary in Luke 1:28?

Paul uses this same greeting. You are favored. You are given grace.

Prayer and Meditation: Where should you start? Today, take the phone call from the Lord. Take a deep breath, and let it all out. Don't pretend things are fine if they are not. Spend some time in prayer talking about the hard things. Thank Him for His presence. Thank Him for the blessings. Thank Him for making you holy in Christ and for faithfully extending His grace and peace.

If you're really doing fine, great or super great, praise the Lord for the many blessings you have. Praise Him for relationships that encourage you. Praise Him for redeeming you. Praise Him for making you holy and for faithfully extending His grace and peace.

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Day 2 - The Sender of the Message

Words are powerful. A single word can evoke a feeling or a picture in your mind. Some words sound like what they mean. Snicker. The word sounds like you are secretly laughing. I can think of many gross words that fall into this category: pimple, booger, guts, scar. These words define gross things, but they also sound like what they are. The double p in pimple just seems like something is ready to pop. The b and g combo in booger sounds gooey and sticky. The hard c and r sounds in scar seem like something unkind has left a mark, a line, a jagged furrow in the skin, or the heart. Some words are beautiful such as effervescent. I think epiphany sounds like an idea just occurred. Ding. The sound of a word can be as important as the word itself.

Lavish is a word that I love. It sounds lyrical and flowing and soft. It evokes a feeling of comfort and opulence. When I think of lavish things, I find myself smiling.

What are some things that come to mind when you think of something *lavish*?

Read Ephesians 1:3-14. What do we learn about God from v. 3?

Describe the plan God has made in v. 4?

What characteristic of God guides his planning at the end of v. 4?

What gift does He offer us in this verse?

Read verses 5 and 11. What role does God offer us and what is the result of this?

What else does He do in verses 7-8?

God has done so many things for us. He has given so much! With all that we have learned about God's character in these verses, how is the word *lavish* fitting? How would you describe this aspect of God?

Paul was the messenger, the apostle, but it is the power of the sender that gives the message its significance.

Read these verses and note what they say about the power of God.

Psalm 147:4-5

Isaiah 40:28

Jeremiah 10:10-13

Think about a timeline. What do these verses say about God's control and power over time?

Revelation 22:13

Isaiah 46:9-10

Ephesians 1:4, 10

We have an incredibly powerful God!

In the world, power is often coupled with corruption. Lord Acton, a writer of history during the Victorian Age, is credited with saying, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Because we see this truth echoed throughout history, it is stunning, shocking, and unbelievable to think about the absolute power that God has without experiencing a sense of awe that He would temper his own authority with love.

How do we see His power over sin Eph. 1:19-22?

God's greatest power is giving life; everlasting, glorious life. He demonstrated His power over death in the resurrection of Christ. His great strength is demonstrated in His incredible love for us. How do these verses show His power and his love?

2 Corinthians 13:4

Romans 1:16

Romans 5:8

Looking over the first chapter of Ephesians, write down two or three the blessings that God gives.

As you think about your life this week, what blessings has God given you?

Prayer and Meditation: Spend some time meditating on the power of God. Stand in awe of His power. Honor Him for showing kindness, grace and mercy, when He has the power to do whatever He wants. Write down some of the ways you see His kindness, grace and mercy in your life. Praise Him for His love for you.

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Day 3 - Receivers of the Gift

I was in second grade. Standing in a line, shoulder to shoulder with my classmates, we hear the gym teacher explain the rules to kickball, as if we have never heard them before. We have been playing this game for eons and the teacher is taking eons and eons to explain things we all already know. Our little bodies wiggle while we impatiently wait, aching to kick, run, catch. We are itching for competition. And he is taking for-ev-er!

Finally, he finishes. He eyes our line and carefully selects two equally matched team captains. Then, they stand on either side of the teacher and begin picking teams. Excitement builds. All the boys get picked first. This is expected.

Now, the girls are being selected, one by one. A new feeling comes over me. Excitement for the game is replaced with hope tinged with self-consciousness. One by one, a girl's name rings through the air. One by one, each runs to their side. Self-consciousness is replaced with discomfort and hope is replaced with desperation as the pool of those of us not picked grows smaller. One by one, the chosen run away from the commoners. I am still waiting. The fewer of us there are, the more obvious it is that we are not wanted. Embarrassment ebbs into our souls. Our misery isolates us, not just from the chosen, but also from each other. Only three of us are left in the group when I hear my name. I run to my team, yet somehow, I still feel unchosen.

Read Ephesians 1:3-14 again. Let's look at this section from another perspective. What does v. 3 say about you?

Have you thought about what it means to have every spiritual blessing? It's a bit overwhelming and incredible to comprehend. Think about what it would be like for your physical body to have every physical blessing from morning til night. I would wake up each day refreshed, without aches or pains and without stress, anxiety, or worry. Then I would eat delicious, healthy food for breakfast. I would energetically go to my work, ready for my tasks, finding joy in my accomplishments. Maybe my desk chair would be especially comfortable with a sunny window view. The rest of my day would continue in the same way because I have every physical blessing. Can you imagine your life with every physical blessing?

Now imagine what kinds of spiritual blessings you could have? You can wake up each morning and praise God for His rest in your soul. You can walk away from shame and regret because of his forgiveness. You can live in love, God's kind of love. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-13, thinking carefully about what it means to be loved by God in this way.

Can you grasp his life for you? You can have confidence in His love! You know his promise for every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, an eternal relationship with God, full of love and grace!

What is lavished on us in Ephesians 1:7-8? Why is this a spiritual gift?

What does Ephesians 1:4 say about you?

I don't know about you, but I have always wanted to be chosen! This is the most significant spiritual blessing! Did you notice when you were chosen? God's timeline is stunning. God's knowledge of us is stunning.

What does the writer of Psalm 139:13-15 say about God's knowledge of us?

Isaiah 44:2

Psalm 44:20-21

Our all-knowing God, kindly chose you to be on his team! What did you do to deserve to be picked? Nothing. Skim Ephesians 1. Do you find any necessary qualities or skills to be chosen? Nope.

Some people misinterpret this as degrading, implying that they are worth nothing because their efforts are worth nothing. Somehow they have confused the message. God is saying that you don't have to do anything and that you are worth everything! His offer to be on His team is free! He is the giver. We are the receivers.

What do you learn about God's promise of salvation from Ephesians 1:13 and from 2 Corinthians 1:21-22?

The Ephesians would have understood the significance of a seal on a written promise from a King. His seal, a stamp or signet pressed into wax, turned agreement into action. What happened in Esther 3:9-12 that shows the power of a seal?

According to Esther 8:8, how much power is the seal made by a king's signet ring?

We are sealed in the same way, by the Holy Spirit with a promise from God that cannot be revoked!

In Ephesians 1:14, we see another description of the work of the Holy Spirit. What is it?

Business documents used this same Greek term “guarantee” or “deposit” to designate a down payment. It’s a financial term, a commitment with a cost.

What do we receive in Ephesians 1:6?

Prayer and Meditation: We are chosen! We are on the team! As you talk to God today, think about the significance of being chosen. Give all of the moments in life when you have felt overlooked or unpicked to the Lord in prayer. Thank Him for choosing you. Ask Him to give you peace. Praise him for his many spiritual blessings given to you in Christ. Praise Him for his glorious grace.

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Day 4 - The Plan

Hello reader,

I love to read. It's not a unique hobby, so it might be your hobby, too. You probably could have guessed this about me since I have already divulged my love for words. I have a dictionary from 1928 which includes words like "hugger-mugger" and warns against using base, colloquial words such as...get ready for it..."awful". I love books. I love classic literature, set in times long past. I like a good Agatha Christie with unfolding plot lines and well crafted surprises that hint at secrets for the reader. Mystery novels are wonderful when they have a spectacular ending. It's satisfying to see all the clues, hints, and connections that seem so obvious after you know the ending! Reader, do you love a good mystery?

*Warmly,
Schawn*

In Ephesians, Paul talks about a great mystery. How does Daniel describe God in Daniel 2:27-28?

God is a revealer of mysteries! It happened all the time in Scripture!

I love the story of Simeon. Read Luke 2:25-32. What was revealed to Simeon?

Let's talk about mysteries! The word Paul uses when he talks about a mystery refers to a divine plan that had not been known previously, but now it is revealed. He's not talking about an unsolved mystery or a puzzle or a conundrum. A better word might be an unveiling!

What do we know about the mystery or the unveiling from Ephesians 1:9?

When will his plan take place? Read Ephesians 1:10.

What does fullness of time mean? In short, when everything is perfectly ready. Fullness. Sproul, in his commentary on Ephesians, says

"If I were to take a glass, put it under a tap, turn the water on, and fill up the glass with water, I'd leave a tiny margin at the top of the glass so I could carry it from one place to another without spilling any water. The image that I see for [fullness], however, is someone putting the glass under the tap, turning on the water, and letting the water keep running so that it pours over the top of the glass. That's fullness." (Sproul 2023, 19-20)

When every moment was just right, God revealed His plan to Daniel. When every moment was just right, God revealed His plan to the world! That is grace overflowing!

What does 2 Peter 3:9 tell us about God's plan and God's timing?

What is God's ultimate plan according to Ephesians 1:10?

He has always been at work, and now we see and understand this part of His plan. What happens as a part of His plan in Ephesians 1:11?

When Paul uses the term "we," he is including himself in the group of believers who are Jewish. What does Paul say that he is in Ephesians 1:12?

Why does Paul say that he is part of the mystery? For what purpose?

God's faithfulness to the Jewish nation was only part of His plan. Paul says he may have been among the first to believe, but that implies there are others! There are more believers to come! Look at Ephesians 1:13. Who else is included?

Have you heard the word of truth? Do you know the Gospel? Reader, this verse is not just talking about the Ephesians. It is talking about us! We are a part of the revealed mystery! We are a part of the grand plan!

Read Ephesians 1:13-14. Why are you and I a part of the grand plan? For what purpose?

Prayer and Meditation: As you close your time in the Word today, praise the Lord! Praise Him for His grand plan. Praise Him for His timing! Praise Him for revealing the mystery! Praise Him for His promise, His seal, His guarantee! Praise him!

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Day 5 - It's Personal

Before technology exploded into our world, staying in touch took a little more effort. Handwritten letters are not entirely a thing of the past. People still value them, perhaps more than a quick text or message on Instagram, Facebook, or Snapchat. Ephesians is a letter from a good friend.

Paul first met people in Ephesus in Acts 18:18-21. What do we learn about his connection with the people there? Who does he leave behind?

Paul returns to this city later. Read Acts 19:1-9. This is an interesting passage which points to the need for the disciples there to learn more about God's work in the church. How long does Paul stay this time? What does he do?

Paul's love and concern for these young Christians is evident in his commitment for them to learn the scriptures and understand the love and grace given by God. How do we see this Acts 19:10?

The letter to the Ephesians gives us a clear picture about Paul's excitement for their growing faith! Years after leaving these people, he writes to them. Read Ephesians 1:15-22. What does he say he has heard about them?

What is he praying for? Why?

According to this section what is God's power capable of?

Who also has this power?

What does this say about us?

There are so many encouraging words here, but let's circle back to Ephesians 1:18. Paul says the "eyes of your heart have been enlightened" by the power of the Spirit. We know in our hearts something that is transformative. Deep in our souls, something gives us light. We do not just

understand, but rather, we “know deeply” (Winger 2015, 241). By the power of the Spirit, what does Paul say he wants us to know?

Hope is a powerful thing! It is not just optimism or wishful thinking. What does Romans 8:24-25 tell us about hope?

No matter where you are in life, this message in Ephesians is for you! God has called you to a life of hope in Christ!

Imagine Paul is a friend writing you this letter. It's not just a quick click, liking a post. This is an intentional word. This is a handwritten letter, stamped and sent through snail mail, addressed to you. God is using Paul to speak, not just to the Ephesians, but also to you. Trials in your life may leave you feeling overwhelmed. You may have connections at work or relationships at home that are being tested with tension and trials. We can be left feeling, well, a lot of emotions, but especially powerlessness. When we can do nothing, we need the reminder that we belong to a powerful God who has given us the Holy Spirit. His power is working in us! He gives us grace! Grace upon grace! He will give you wisdom! He will open your eyes to see ways He is giving you strength and hope! How can Paul's words encourage you in a trial you are facing?

Prayer and Meditation: As you pray for God's Spirit to give you open eyes, ask that you will know the hope to which He has called you, and that you will remember the riches of His glorious inheritance for you! Pray for the immeasurable greatness of His power in you to live a life of grace in your relationships. Ask again for His great grace! Praise the Lord for His work in you!

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Small Group Discussion

Opener: When was the last time you sent or received a card in the mail?

Back in the day, letters from friends and family were often addressed to a group of people and were meant to be read aloud to them. For example, in the novel *Little Women* by Louisa Alcott, Marmee and her daughters gather around to hear the letter from Pa, to hear his stories, his words of counsel, and his words of encouragement.

Let's gather together. Let's listen and learn. Let's share about how God is at work in our lives as we read and reflect on Ephesians 1.

Read Ephesians 1

Questions for Discussion

What do we learn about God from this chapter?

What words would you use to describe Him? Why are these attributes important for you to remember?

How does Paul express his feelings about the people in Ephesus?

How does that reflect the way God sees each of us? How might that impact the way we look at ourselves?

What is something you learned or are taking from your time in the Word this week?

How has God shown you grace this week?

Close with a time of prayer.

Reference List

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