



Sermon-Based Study Guide  
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Ephesians 1.1-14

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I. Introduction to this Series and Study

This week we kick off our fall series Welcome Home, turning our attention to the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus.

The Letter to the Ephesians was most likely written by Paul seven to ten years after his visit to the city (see Acts 18 and 19), while he was a prisoner in Rome (see Ephesians 3.1, 4.1, and 6.20). Some scholars have challenged Pauline authorship, since the author does not refer to anyone by name (as in Romans 16) or exude warmth for the congregation (as in his Letter to the Philippians). This need not be the case, however.

Considering the number of cities in south Asia Minor, this epistle was in all probability a circular letter, shared with more than one church in the area. As such, it's written in a more general manner. Since Ephesus was the most prominent city between Rome and Antioch, it became known as Ephesians. For more information regarding the background of this letter, read Ephesians 6.21-22, Colossians 4.7-9, and Philemon.

Throughout this series we will uncover deep and profound spiritual truths revealing how we - as the Body of Christ - have been brought together in unity, adopted into God's household through His gracious, providential election! What's more, we need not await heaven to experience God's presence. On the contrary, the presence and power of the Triune God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - is at work in the church, today!

In other words, Welcome Home!

II. Connecting With One Another

What is your favorite part of being home? For instance, when you go away for a week, what do you most appreciate when you return to your house?

III. Study the Text

a. Read Ephesians 1.1-2.

Specific customary greetings existed in the first century world in which Paul wrote. And yet, as he does here, Paul commonly alters such standard greetings.

Read other introductions in Romans 1.1-7, 1st Corinthians 1.1-3, 2nd Corinthians 1.1-2, Galatians 1.1-3, Philippians 1.1-2, 2nd Thessalonians 1.1-2, and Philemon 1-3. What common characteristics do you find in these greetings?

b. A common refrain in each of these greetings is the phrase "Grace and Peace." While commonly used in other letters, these are key words in Ephesians. Look up the following verses below, and note how these words are used throughout this book:

<i>Grace</i>	<i>Peace</i>
2.5-8 _____	6.15 _____
4.7 _____	2.14 _____

Do any of the uses of these words surprise you? If so, how?

- c. In the original manuscripts, before translation into English, Ephesians 1.3-14 was one, single sentence. Read through it, being careful to take in all that Paul has written.

John Stott states that in these verses Paul "neither pauses for breath, nor punctuates his words with full stops." Why do you think this is so? Do you ever talk or write (or send text messages!) like this?

- d. These opening words of Ephesians have been likened to "a magnificent gateway," "a golden chain of many links," "a kaleidoscope of dazzling lights and shifting colours," "a snowball tumbling down a hill, picking up volume as it descends," "some long-winded racehorse... careening onward at full speed," "the overture of an opera which contains the successive melodies that are to follow," "like the preliminary flight of the eagle, rising and wheeling round, as though for a while uncertain what direction in his boundless freedom he shall take."

Which of these resonates most with you?

- e. Some scholars note a Trinitarian structure in this passage, similar to the Apostle's and Nicene Creeds, with God the Father electing (verses 4-6), the Son redeeming (verses 7-12), and the Spirit sealing (verses 13-14), with each stanza concluding "to the praise of His glory."

What do you think? How does that open up these verses to you?

- f. Read Ephesians 1.3-6.

What do you think of when you read the word "predestined"? How have you heard it explained? Why do you think we are predestined? What does *this passage* say? What is the *purpose* of predestination?

Warren Wiersbe writes, "[w]e often have the idea that God saves sinners mainly because He pities them or wants to rescue them from eternal judgment, but God's main purpose is that He might be glorified." What do you think about that statement? Do you agree? Why or why not?

- g. Read Exodus 19.4-6 and Deuteronomy 7.6. How do these passages from the Hebrew Scriptures expand your understanding of God's election and predestination?

- h. Verse 3 declares "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." Note three blessings, which relate to the past, the present, and the future:

- In the past, God "chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." (verse 4)
- In the present, "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us." (verse 7-8)
- In the future, we will be a part of the "plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory." (verse 11-12)

Stott writes that the "past blessing is 'election', the present 'adoption' to be God's children, and the future 'unification' when all things will be united under Christ."

Spend some time reflecting upon the past, present and future of God's blessings.

How have you seen these at work in your life?

- i. It has been written that "adoption as God's sons and daughters brings both a plus and a minus, an immense gain and a necessary loss. We gain access to him as our Father through redemption or forgiveness. But we lose our blemishes, beginning at once by the sanctifying

work of the Holy Spirit, until we are finally made perfect in heaven. The words which seem to unite the privilege and the responsibility of our adoption are the expression *before him* (verse 4), meaning 'in his sight' or 'in his presence'. For to live our life in the conscious presence of our Father is both an immeasurable privilege and a constant challenge to please him."

How have you received the "immeasurable privilege" of adoption?

How do you respond to the "constant challenge to please him"?

- j. Reread verses 11-14. It has been written that in these verses "[t]he apostle moves from the pronoun *we* (himself and his fellow Jewish believers) to *you also* (his believing Gentile readers) to *our* inheritance (in which both groups equally share)... Already, however, by the repetition of the words *in him* (verses 11, 13) he emphasizes that Christ is the reconciler, and that it is through union with Christ that the people of God are one."

Why do you think this theme of unity is an important one when talking about the church?

How could the congregation of Good Shepherd become increasingly unified?

- k. In verse 14, Paul declares that the Holy Spirit is "a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance." In so doing, he uses a Hebrew word which came into Greek usage by Phoenician traders (still with me!?). In Modern Greek, this word is used to refer to an engagement ring, but in ancient times it signified a "first installment, deposit, down payment, pledge, that [paid] a part of the purchase price in advance... [making] a contract valid."

How have you experienced the gift of the Holy Spirit as the down payment of our future inheritance?

#### IV. Pray

- a. Thank God for his election, that believers were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world!
- b. Pray that through this Welcome Home series Good Shepherd would continue to be and even more so become a unified community of faith, working together to glorify God,
- c. Lift up the many elementary, middle, high school and college students going back to school this fall, asking that God would solidify their faith in Christ and use them to declare His good news on their campuses.