

Blessed to Be a Blessing

THE MYSTERY OF WHY GOD CHOSE YOU

(A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS)

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So Many Blessings

(Ephesians 1:1-14)

The book of Ephesians is such a positive book! It was written by Paul, the first missionary to the nations, while he was in prison in Rome for sharing the gospel. So you'd think he would be feeling frustrated, discouraged, and defeated.

Instead, Paul starts his letter to the church in faraway Ephesus with a list of all the ways God had blessed them. This is certainly not the way I'd be tempted to act if I were in his shoes!

Just as this letter was a blessing to that early assembly of believers, I'm sure that studying Ephesians can be a blessing to you, too. If you are a follower of Jesus the Messiah, as those earlier believers were, Paul's letter will remind you of all the blessings you have in Christ. If you can get a grip on what God has done for you and the power He wants to flow through you, you'll be re-energized to serve Him and others for the rest of your life.

You see, often we women act poor when, in fact, we're rich. We wake up discouraged in the morning, overcome by our problems, depressed by our circumstances, and overwhelmed by our challenges. However, if we could only see how rich we are and how much God has provided for us, we would wake up with energy and excitement, amazed that God is willing to work in our lives.

The first 14 verses of Ephesians list the blessings with which we have been showered.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,
To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:
Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

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. For **he chose us in him** before the creation of the world **to be holy and blameless** in his sight. In love **he predestined us to be adopted** as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious **grace, which he has freely given us** in the One he loves. In him we have **redemption** through his blood, the **forgiveness** of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he **made known to us the mystery of his will** according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to

bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

In him we were also **chosen**, having been **predestined** according to 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 hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were **included in Christ** when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were **marked in him with a seal**, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit **guaranteeing our inheritance** until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:1-14, NIV).

1. You were chosen!

Verse 4 says that “he chose us in him before the creation of the world.” You were the very reason that He created the world.

“All the days ordained for me
were written in your book
before one of them came to be” (Psalm 139:16).

When you feel insignificant and unimportant, get a glimpse of how precious you are to God!

2. You are holy!

Verse 4 also says that “he chose us... to be holy.” This was also appointed before creation, but our intentional sin thwarts God's plan. That's okay. When

God looks at you now, He sees the perfect and sinless life of His precious Son, Jesus.

To be holy means to be “set apart” for a special purpose. Of course, our job is to walk like we’re “set apart,” avoiding sin or anything that would displease God. But doesn’t it help to know that God has taken your life, cleaned you up (in the blood of His Son), and placed you up in a special place?

3. You are blameless!

If you do a quick search on the word “blameless” in the Bible, you’ll see that to be blameless means to avoid evil, to keep yourself from sin, and to walk in God’s laws.

When I look at my own heart, I’m never blameless. I am continually reminded of my sin and my shortcomings. However, when God looks at me, He sees only His son Jesus, who walked His entire life without sin and was truly blameless. Jesus took my blame on Himself on the cross. He paid for all of it. There is nothing left to be blamed for!

Now my part is to *walk* blamelessly. In other words, I need to live every day like what God sees in me. I won’t be able to do it perfectly, but as I confess my sin, He is “faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

4. You are adopted!

Many of us are having to be all grown up, doing our best as wives and moms, when our own parents have

died or live very far away. We're lonely, and we often need families ourselves.

How wonderful it is to realize that God has adopted us.

**“A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows,
is God in his holy dwelling”** (Psalm 68:5, NIV).

Even more so, as I've studied the Bible, I've come to realize that my Swedish-German-Scottish heritage just isn't included in the promises to Israel given first to Abraham in Genesis 12. I'm not a Jew! I'm a blonde-haired, stubborn-nosed European! But “God so loved the world,” and in His gracious plan, He adopts those from every country, every race, and every blood line into His great family. I am grafted into Abraham's blessings and promises, because of the love of my Heavenly Father (see Romans 11).

So when you need a family, realize that you have a Father who loves you... and a host of brothers and sisters beyond number. Are you plugged into that family?

5. You have been given His free grace!

“...to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves” (Eph. 1:6, NIV).

Grace is another word for favor, for pleasure, for gifts that you weren't expecting, that you didn't buy, and that you didn't deserve.

Of course, all people recognize that their gods bestow favors. The difference is that most cultures require somehow earning the favor of the gods. If the weather is bad, the gods must be angry... so we need to offer sacrifices to appease them. If someone is sick, the gods must be displeased, so what can we do to get on their good sides?

Our God is different in that He recognizes that we are unable to please Him, that we will continue to choose sin, because our hearts are evil continually. In spite of this, He gives us His favor.

For instance, it says in Ezekiel 36:22-29 (NIV):

“Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I show myself holy through you before their eyes.

” ‘For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone

and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God. I will save you from all your uncleanness.”

God’s favor is so great that He makes us into new creatures, a people that desire to love and obey Him and to keep His laws. All of this is because of Him, not because of our own worthiness.

6. You are redeemed!

The story of Ruth is a story of redemption, of a man who loved a woman he barely knew and paid a great sum of money so that he could marry her and care for her.

You also are redeemed by God. Your redemption came at a great and terrible price to Christ, the shedding of His blood for you. When you feel unloved, please reflect on the great love of Christ in purchasing your redemption. You are no longer owned by Satan, but you are the priceless possession of your Heavenly Father.

7. You are forgiven!

Have you ever done something so terrible that you were just sure that you could never be forgiven? Maybe someone else was so hurt by your actions that they just can’t bring themselves to forgive you either.

Being unforgiven means living under a terrible cloud. You can try and try to make it up to the other person,

but no matter what good things you do, you really can't go back and undo the past.

That cloud can be lifted when you realize that you are forgiven by God. Ephesians 1:8 says that He lavished this forgiveness on you with "all wisdom and understanding," which means that He understood perfectly well how you had sinned. He wasn't forgiving you blindly. The past really did happen.

No matter what you've done, though, you can be forgiven because of Jesus. Only God is capable of forgiving like this, and when you feel crushed by your past, run to Him for the grace that He wants to lavish on you.

8. You are predestined to know the mystery of His will!

This blessing is so huge that we're going to talk about it a lot more in the coming weeks, but for today, let me just let you in on a little secret: God has an amazing plan, a mystery that has been hidden since the beginning of the world... and that plan involves you!

To be predestined means to be determined or planned in advance. God's plan to redeem the world is magnificent in scope, and each little detail has been thought out ahead of time. Satan can do nothing to thwart God's plan, although he will continue to try.

Meanwhile, God planned for YOU to know what His plan is and for you to participate in bringing it to pass. Can you see how important your life is and how valuable you are?

9. You are included.

Many times, we stand on the sidelines as others receive honors, gifts, or glory. But God's plan to redeem the world includes you, and you are on the sidelines no longer. God has a plan for your redemption, not just the redemption of certain special, important people.

10. You are marked with a seal.

On the day that you came to God for forgiveness and redemption, when your eyes were opened to the marvelous plan God has for your life, He not only showered you with blessings but He also marked you with His seal.

A seal was used by a king in ancient times to signify that a decree had come from his very own mouth. The seal God has used to mark your life is His own precious Holy Spirit. In the pages ahead, we'll talk about the significance of this much more.

A seal is permanent and shows that something is genuine. The Holy Spirit's presence in your life shows that God means business with you and intends to complete what He has started in you.

“...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6).

11. You are guaranteed an inheritance.

The Holy Spirit is also the down payment and the guarantee of your future inheritance. His power in your life is so great that you can now be assured that even great things are coming! Again, we'll talk about this more soon.

LET'S GET PRACTICAL...

These blessings are deep, but I've only scratched the surface. I'm hoping that you won't simply read this chapter; rather, I'm praying that you'll use this as a starting point for learning even more about the blessings you have in Christ.

Here are some ideas:

1. Read through Ephesians this week.

As you read the entire book, you'll get a much bigger idea of what God has planned for you and how He wants to use your life. Try to find an hour to sit down and read through the book in one sitting.

- You can read the entire book of Ephesians in the appendix of this book.

2. Begin to memorize Ephesians.

Can you make it your goal to memorize this amazing book in the next two months? (What?! Anne, are you crazy?!) There's a no-brainer way to memorize something, and it involves just two steps:

- **Print the book and hang it where you can easily read it.** (I like to hang it where I do dishes. Another idea is in the bathroom.)

Note: You can print a copy of the book of Ephesians at <http://anneelliott.com/downloads/ephesians.pdf>.

- **Listen to the book repeatedly on CD or mp3.** Try to listen to it every day.

Note: You may instantly download an audio reading of Ephesians for \$2.99 from Christian Book Distributors at <http://tinyurl.com/29hrvuv>.

These two simply steps will firmly cement the Word of God in your mind, with hardly any work at all from you.

3. Meditate on the blessings in today's passage.

I recommend that you take a sheet of paper and, using calligraphy or some fonts from your computer, make a beautiful reminder of each of these blessings.

Hang it where you'll see it often and meditate on it as you go about your work this week.

As you think about how God has blessed you, consider ways in which you can extend these blessings to others. Is there someone who needs your forgiveness? Is there a lonely person who needs a family?

4. Finally, read Psalm 139 (next page), marveling at the ways God chose you before the foundations of the world, planning how He would redeem you, because of His great love for you.

Psalm 139

O LORD, you have searched me
and you know me.
You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
Before a word is on my tongue
you know it completely, O LORD.

You hem me in—behind and before;
you have laid your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.

Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.

If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,”
even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully
made;
your works are wonderful,

I know that full well.
My frame was not hidden from you
 when I was made in the secret place.
When I was woven together in the depths of the
earth,
 your eyes saw my unformed body.
All the days ordained for me
 were written in your book
 before one of them came to be.

How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!
 How vast is the sum of them!
Were I to count them,
 they would outnumber the grains of sand.
When I awake,
 I am still with you.

If only you would slay the wicked, O God!
 Away from me, you bloodthirsty men!
They speak of you with evil intent;
 your adversaries misuse your name.
Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD,
 and abhor those who rise up against you?
I have nothing but hatred for them;
 I count them my enemies.

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
 test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
 and lead me in the way everlasting.