

Plundering the Promises + Playing Our Part

A SUMMER IN
Ephesians

**DAILY DEVOTIONAL
AND PRAYER GUIDE
WEEK 1 (MAY 27 - JUNE 1)**



PLUNDERING THE PROMISES + PLAYING OUR PART

A Summer in Ephesians

I remember it like it was yesterday. My first official day of seminary. I walked into the old Beardslee Library (which is no longer standing), and made my way up to the seventh floor. There, I met the rest of my fellow first year classmates for our first ever Spiritual Formation Class. We didn't begin with introductions or icebreakers. We began with Scripture. Our instructor told us, "Every time we gather for this class this semester, we are going to read Philippians 2 twice, and then we are going to break into pairs and answer the question, 'What is the Spirit saying to us through this text?'" And that's what we did. Philippians 2. Twice. Every. Single. Monday. Of. The. Semester. The most surprising thing? The dynamic and diverse ways God spoke through that same Scripture. Each week a different verse would resonate, a word I hadn't noticed before would jump out of the woodwork, a surprising spiritual insight would bubble up from somewhere deep in my soul, a classmate would share something I had never considered before.

I've become convinced and convicted that I often do not read Scripture slowly nor deliberately enough. Scripture reading often becomes a box to check or a quick religious nugget to quickly gobble or a spiritual adrenaline shot that will bolster and sustain my frenetic agenda. This summer devotional's main intent is to counteract this pervasive posture toward and relationship to Scripture.

Scripture is not fast-food.

It's not grab-and-go. It's not something we can cram into our mouths on our morning commute. Scripture is a lavish banquet-meal to savor; not a spiritual snack-wrap to quickly consume, but God's great big story of redemption that can and will consume us if we give it its proper time and space.

This summer we're going to work really, really slowly through Ephesians. We are going to intentionally ingest this beautiful book.

ABOUT THE DEVOTIONAL | FORMAT AND INVITATIONS

Weekly Readings: For this summer's devotional, we are not going to have daily readings, but rather weekly readings from Ephesians. You will be invited to read the same Scripture twice every day for the entire week. My encouragement would be that you read the passage aloud. Reading aloud boosts reading comprehension by activating parts of your brain that are not activated when reading silently.

Daily Reflections: For each day, there will be a short reflection for you to consider that will prompt a particular prayer practice or a call to action.

Prompt for Prayer/Action: Author and Pastor Pete Greig likes to say, "The Bible was not meant to be read through, but prayed through." The Apostle James wrote, "Be doers of the word" (James 1:22). Each day you'll be invited to pray through the weekly Scripture and/or participate in the action the Scripture is calling forth.

Memorization + Internalization: In addition to the weekly readings, daily reflections, and daily prompts for prayer + action, there is a parallel invitation to memorize and internalize the book of Ephesians. With more printed Bibles than we know what to do with, and digital Bibles at our fingertips, our great access to Scripture has led to a diminishment and depreciation of memorizing the Scripture. Our ancient ancestors in the faith often had no choice. They didn't have books. Most didn't have access to scrolls. Many couldn't even read. The only way to know the Scripture was to receive it orally, get it into their heads through repetition, and then into their hearts through faithful obedience to the memorized Word. This summer, we are going to recover the ancient practice of Scripture memorization. Each day has a "memorization benchmark" to help you memorize and internalize the weekly Scripture passage.

Memorization Tips : If you do accept the challenge to memorize + internalize Ephesians, below are a few tips/tricks.

Repetition, Repetition, Repetition: Read the verse(s) you are attempting to memorize over and over and over (and over) again out loud. After 5-10 times of repeating the verse, try to recite it from memory. You will be surprised just how effective good ole fashion repetition is.

Motion: Marry a hand/body motion to different words/phrases in the verse(s) you are trying to memorize. Engaging your body in memorization makes it a kinesthetic practice rather than a solely cerebral one. If you ever go to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, you will see Orthodox Jews rocking back and forth as they recite the Torah...this is exactly what they are doing.

Tune or Song: If you are musically inclined, think about putting the verse you are trying to memorize to a tune/rhythm/melody. It's far easier to recall a song than it is to recall monotone prose.

Mnemonic Device: Create a mnemonic device. Does the first letter of each word in the verse you're trying to memorize make a word? Full disclosure–this isn't my favorite strategy for memorization (because you end up focusing on memorizing the mnemonic device and not the Scripture), but it could be helpful for you.

WEEK 1 EPHESIANS 1:1-14

MONDAY (MAY 27)

Weekly Reading | Ephesians 1:1-14

Silence

Weekly Reading | Ephesians 1:1-14

Silence

Daily Reflection | The way Paul addresses the Ephesians at the very beginning of his letter to them is striking. “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God’s holy people in Ephesus” (Eph 1:1). “Holy people” is certainly one way to translate the Greek word *hagioi*, but another way to translate it is “saint”. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus. From the outset of his letter, before he says anything else, Paul wants the Ephesians to know what is truest of them—that they are saints. In Christ, our deepest and truest identity is not “sinner” (though, that’s an accurate designation), our deepest and truest identity is “saint.” Where sin runs deep, His grace is more.

Prompt for Prayer/Action | Theologically, it’s easy to apprehend how in Christ we are saints; how Christ’s righteousness becomes our righteousness. It’s altogether harder for this theological reality to descend the 18 inches from our heads to our hearts. Spend a moment resting in your truest and deepest identity.

Breathe in: Jesus

Breathe out: makes me holy.

Memorization Practice + Benchmark: 1:1-2

TUESDAY (MAY 28)

Weekly Reading | Ephesians 1:1-14

Silence

Weekly Reading | Ephesians 1:1-14

Silence

Daily Reflection | Paul begins Ephesians unlike he begins any of his other letters. Usually, after his initial address and salutation, Paul will launch into a very pastorally personalized list of thanksgivings and an encouraging and beautiful prayer report. But Paul begins Ephesians with an eruption of praise. N.T. Wright observes, “Before Paul will even come to a report of his specific prayers, he establishes what is after all the appropriate context for all Christian prayer, reflection, and exhortation: the worship and adoration of the God who has lavished his love upon us” (Wright, 4).

Prompt for Prayer/Action | We were made, designed, and wired to worship. All right thinking, praying, and living for Jesus begins with worship of Jesus. Take some time now to worship Jesus—whether that be in song, in spoken prayer, or in silent adoration.

Memorization Practice + Benchmark: 1:3-6

W E D N E S D A Y (M A Y 2 9)

Weekly Reading | Ephesians 1:1-14

Silence

Weekly Reading | Ephesians 1:1-14

Silence

Daily Reflection | Have you noticed how many times in this section Paul speaks about the Ephesians being “in Christ”? Nine times! Nine times in 14 verses. What does being “in Christ” mean? Dr. Tim Gombis helps us out: “The people of God are not merely loved by God or saved by God; we are brought into God. God has done something outrageous to us, bringing us into Christ so that we now have a completely new location on the cosmic map” (Gombis, 68-69). Friend, you are “in Christ”. You are seated with Jesus in the heavenly realm. Your cosmic location has changed.

Prompt for Prayer/Action | Meditate on, speak, and/or sing these familiar words:

How firm a foundation, O saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in his excellent Word!
What more can he say than to you he has said
Who unto the Savior for refuge have fled?

In ev'ry condition, in sickness, in health,
In poverty's vale, or abounding in wealth,
At home and abroad, on the land, on the sea —
The Lord, the Almighty, your strength e'er shall be.

Fear not, I am with you. Oh, be not dismayed,
For I am your God and will still give you aid;
I'll strengthen you, help you, and cause you to stand,
Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.

When through the deep waters I call you to go,
The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow,
For I will be with you your troubles to bless
And sanctify you in your deepest distress.

Memorization Practice + Benchmark: 1:7-10

THURSDAY (MAY 30)

Weekly Reading | Ephesians 1:1-14

Silence

Weekly Reading | Ephesians 1:1-14

Silence

Daily Reflection | Predestination. Election. These are words we Reformed folk are familiar with. And yet, their mention still sends our minds spinning and evokes a bit of fear and trembling. Paul uses both of these words in verses 4 and 5: For he chose us (elected us) in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.” These verses are incredibly comforting– in Christ, God chose us in love to be adopted into Christ. But our saving election in Christ is not ultimately for our own sake. Tim Gombis writes, “Those who are called to participate in and perform the gospel of Jesus Christ are those who have their origin in God’s heart and mind from all eternity” (Gombis, 77). God chooses or elects a people for the benefit of the world. Election is not simply salvation from eternal damnation, but salvation for missional participation. Still, we may be tempted to play the “Who’s in? Who’s out?” game. The Canons of Dort warn against this: “this teaching must be set forth with a spirit of discretion... without inquisitive searching into the ways of the Most High” (C/D 1.14). God chooses. God saves. God elects. God predestines. Election and predestination are God’s business, not ours. Our business is participating in and performing the Gospel for the sake of the broken and blessed world God so loves.

Prompt for Prayer/Action | How might you “participate in and perform the Gospel today”? In what ways, simple or profound, might you “reflect the love of Jesus” today?

Memorization Practice + Benchmark: 1:11-12

FRIDAY (MAY 31)

Weekly Reading | Ephesians 1:1-14

Silence

Weekly Reading | Ephesians 1:1-14

Silence

Daily Reflection | Many people have likened the Bible to a masterful work of tapestry. We see brilliant and bright motifs and themes interwoven here and there. We see stories told using sometimes simple, sometimes elaborate patterns in one part that are then re-interpreted, re-performed, and re-told in later parts. The entire work at each and every place held together by the steadfast love of Yahweh. In our section, we see Paul pulling on the thread of an earlier story. Paul says in verse 7, “In him (Jesus), we have redemption through his blood.” Here we cannot help but see a clear parallel to the Exodus Passover story—the story in which the Israelites put blood over their doorposts so that the angel of death would “passover” their homes, but visit the homes of the Egyptians and kill each of their firstborns. This event was catalytic in “delivering” the Israelites out of enslavement in Egypt. N.T. Wright observes, “In fulfillment of the old story, the true ‘redemption’ has occurred. Forgiveness of sins is the real ‘deliverance’ from the real slavemaster. And it’s been accomplished through the sacrificial blood of Jesus” (Wright, 8).

Prompt for Prayer/Action | What Scriptures have been particularly meaningful in your own life? Take a moment to compile the Scriptures that God has used to speak to you throughout the different seasons of your life. Might God be inviting you to pray one of these Scriptures over someone who is experiencing something similar to what you previously experienced?

Memorization Practice + Benchmark: 1:13-14

SATURDAY (JUNE 1)

Weekly Reading | Ephesians 1:1-14

Silence

Weekly Reading | Ephesians 1:1-14

Silence

Daily Reflection | Almost a year ago, I went to our local bank to pick up a cashier's check with our down-payment so that we could close on our first house. I'll never forget how carefully and meticulously I drove with that check in my possession. In verse 14, Paul calls the Holy Spirit, "a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession." The word translated "deposit" is the Greek word *arrabon*, which most literally means— money which in purchases is given as a pledge or down-payment that the full amount will subsequently be paid (Scripture Study App). The Holy Spirit is the "downpayment" of our eternal hope. The Spirit gives us a foretaste of our "All-Things-New" future; the Spirit is the agent that ushers in the Kingdom of God. Scholar F.F. Bruce affirms, "The Spirit consciously received is 'the guarantee of our inheritance,' the pledge given to believers by God to assure them that the glory of the life to come, promised in the gospel, is a well-founded hope, a reality and not an illusion. Believers can enter into the enjoyment of this everlasting portion here and now by the ministry of the Spirit." (Bruce, 266).

Prompt for Prayer/Action | How might Jesus be inviting you to participate in the ministry of the Spirit today? I invite you to be silent for a few minutes and listen for the still small voice of the Spirit. Is the Spirit beckoning you personally to bathe once again in the grace lavished on you in Jesus? Is the Spirit bringing a friend, loved one, co-worker, or neighbor to mind for you to cover in prayer? Could the Spirit be bringing a Scripture to mind the meditate on? "Come, Holy Spirit. Speak, Lord. Your servants are listening."

Memorization Practice + Benchmark: 1:1-14

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