

God Wants to Be With You

Ephesians 1:3-14

Summer Road Trip Week 2

June 18, 2017

Welcome/intro/vision—Happy Father's Day!

From one dad to another, my prayer for all of us who are dads is that we'd love our kids like God does, whether they are very little or all grown up

My own prayer for my own kids and for yours, is that even though they'll have an imperfect Father, that they would always know that they've got a good, good Father in heaven who loves them and is for them

My own dad is here with my mom visiting in town this weekend—dad, thanks for the ways that you loved me and for all the things that you taught me, I'm grateful for you

And for those of you for whom this is a hard day—your relationship with your dad is broken, maybe you've lost your dad at some point and today is a sad reminder of his loss, or you've wanted to be a dad and you just haven't been able to for whatever reason

Know that I'm praying for you this morning, that you'd know the comfort and peace and presence of your perfect Father in heaven.

In case you haven't noticed, it's summer time and for many of us that means getting away for some rest and vacation which is a great thing

But the problem is there are some things that we need in our lives that a week at the beach or a few days with the extended family can't deliver on

How many of you have ever gone into vacation with unrealistic expectations of the problems it could solve?

Have you ever had a great time getting away, but then you came back and—surprise! The problems you left behind hadn't magically disappeared! They were still there and waiting for you when you got back?

There are things that vacation cannot fix!

If we're dealing with guilt over something we've said, done or left undone—we need the gift of forgiveness, and a vacation can't deliver on that

Vacation is great but it can't tell you who you are, what you were made to do on this earth, and it can't help you if you're discovering that you've built your whole identity and security and meaning in life around something too small or that got taken away from you

Like your place on the corporate ladder or our title or around what other people think of us

So for the next six weeks, we're going to take a summer road trip through the New Testament book of Ephesians

to help us to get answers to these deeper questions, to meet some of these hungers that are too deep and too big for a summer vacation to meet

Today, we're going to read back over the passage we looked at last week and tack on a few more verses to go along with it

and today we're going to celebrate the good news that in many ways kicks off our summer road trip 2017: the God of the universe wants to be with you.

How many of you can think of someone that you'd definitely enjoy doing a long-distance cross-country road-trip with? It's a short list, right?!?

How many of you can think of someone that you'd definitely NOT want to do a long-distance cross-country road trip with? That's a longer list!

Today's good news is this: you are on God's list. You are someone that God would choose and actually has already chosen to ride in the car with him for the rest of your life!

If you've got a Bible turn with me to Ephesians chapter 1, if not it'll be on the screen behind me. We'll start with what we read last week

Like we said last week, Ephesians 1:3-14 is one long run-on sentence in the original Greek. Any place you see a period or a comma, the translators are just trying to figure out where Paul maybe took a breath

So we're going to read through this whole long run-on sentence together as Paul piles up praise and thanksgiving and celebration all on top of itself, one after the other

Now as we read this, here's what I want you to look for: among other things, this passage piles up all the gifts that God gives to his people

As we read through this passage, I want you to keep track of all the things that God pours out on his people—we get the first one right away:

³ 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. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. [there's the first 2 of many more to come!]

In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us.

With all wisdom and understanding, ⁹ he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

¹¹ 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, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

10th grade biology was one of the low points of my academic career.

It didn't come very naturally, my teacher wasn't the best, and I think they filled the whole class with the guys from the wrestling team who had lost most of their brain cells.

And so I did what every good 15-year-old boy does when he's in that situation: I complained to anyone who would listen

so my family heard a good bit about my woes with 10th grade biology

And one night after yet another tale of woe and struggle, my dad offered to sit down with me after dinner and walk through the material in the book together

And so we did that night. And again the next night. And again the next night. And then beyond that, several nights a week for months!

And in those moments together he'd not only help me to understand what was going on, we'd also laugh, and joke, and somehow he'd make it fun—my dad's always had a way of making things fun.

He seemed to genuinely enjoy helping me to understand biology. And together we got through 10th grade Biology, it was a TEAM EFFORT! That was a shared A that we got for that class!

And in those weeks of slogging through 10th grade biology my dad gave me a great, great gift: he not only didn't shame me for not getting it on my own, he communicated to me that he enjoyed spending time with me.

He communicated that he loved me, that he wanted to be with me, that he was glad to be with me

In this passage, God is pouring out his gifts to us. And just like with my dad, there's other stuff happening and some work for us to do and some things for us to figure out

But at the core of this passage, is this same great news from God that I got from my dad: that God loves to be with you, with us—God enjoys being with you.

Did you track the gifts Paul talks about? Here's the list that I've got:

**Every spiritual blessing (v. 3),
holy and blameless (v.4)
Adoption to sonship (v.5)**

Paul is using that sonship language very specifically because in ancient Roman culture it was the sons who got the goods. They were the ones who were elevated and who got the inheritance and who were treasured and most valued

In fact, it was somewhat common for a rich guy without any sons to adopt a son and designate them as an heir to the family fortune

Paul's not saying that's good or fair, he's just drawing on this common cultural practice to help us to understand our status before God:

We're not just adopted into God's family as children, we're adopted with the ancient status of sons, the recipients of the full inheritance, which is exactly what he comes back to at the end of this long run-on sentence!

Glorious grace (v. 6) has been freely given to us by God,
redemption (v. 7),
forgiveness of sins (7) in accordance with the riches of God's grace lavished
gifted us with **understanding into the mystery of his will (v. 9)**
when the times reach their conclusion Christ will bring **unity (v. 10)**

Chosen and predestined (v. 11),
included (v. 13)
the seal of the Holy Spirit (v. 13)
inheritance to come (v. 14).

Author Gary Chapman many years ago revolutionized marriages by helping people to see that there are a number of different ways to express and receive love

And in order for us to communicate love to our spouses, we need to learn to speak their love language

He says that there are 5 of them: acts of service, gifts, quality time, words of affirmation, physical touch

super insightful, really helpful, if you're married or even if you're single and can't quite figure out how to connect with your parents or a sibling, this can be really great information to have

But before the Love Languages was a thing, God knew that there were love languages. And no matter what yours is, in this list there is something for you here

If gifts are your love language, all of these are God's gifts to you.

If you love acts of service, there's no greater act of service and kindness than for the son of God to serve you through his own death, his own sacrifice, his own blood

If you hear love through physical touch, there's this seal of the Holy Spirit, God's deposit placed in our hearts, the very presence and power of God put in our hearts and if we'll allow it, we can know and experience the touch of God through the presence of the Spirit in our lives

If you love quality time, God has gone to great lengths to adopt you into his family to the status of an heir, to be WITH you is God's great goal for all of creation and all humanity for all time.

And if you love words of affirmation, how about this: YOU ARE CHOSEN. You are wanted. God has chosen to be with you, to call you to be his child

See, few things will undermine our ability to take this summer road trip into answering the deepest questions of our lives then wondering if God wants to be on this trip with us

Have you ever been in a social or work situation where you had a feeling you weren't wanted?

A very few of us relish that situation in perhaps a slightly unhealthy way: I'm here, you deal with me, I don't care if you want me here or not!

But for most of us, having the distinct feeling that you're not wanted puts us in a very insecure and anxious space in our heads and our hearts

We don't tend to relate healthily to the people, opportunities, and challenges around us—we get EDGY!

We get overly defensive or overly aggressive or overly deferential and apologetic or overly mad, depending on your temperament

Feeling un-wanted makes most of us very self-conscious, which ends up making US the center of our attention—it's very, very difficult to love OTHERS when I'm self-absorbed with feeling SELF-conscious

So here's what God wants to communicate to each of us loud and clear as we get started on this summer road trip 2017 together:

you are wanted here with God, with God's people, as a part of God's family—you belong here with God, no matter where you've been or what you've done

God's been at work to choose you to be his child, to be with him, to walk this journey with him, to be a part of his family, adopted into his people

Now to Paul's first century readers, this was incredibly important news because this whole Christianity thing at this point is a very small operation happening in the margins

It doesn't look particularly successful or special, some people around them are joining them and there are some great things happening

But they are also facing opposition and persecution to varying degrees

And so you're a marginal group of people who are just getting involved with this following Jesus thing

and the people around you are looking at you funny, family and friends wondering what's going on with you, why are you doing this

And Paul writes to you and declares in bold opposition to how it looks circumstantially, that you are God's chosen people, that God is doing something unique and remarkable through you and in you and for you

even if right now on the surface of things your little church and your little community of Jesus-followers doesn't look particularly impressive or large

even if it doesn't necessarily look to everyone around you that what's happening in your midst is a God-sized movement in history

You are wanted. God's doing something special right here.

Now we need to get a good handle on some of the ways that Paul talks about this, because he uses some key words that can trip us up if we misunderstand them

Those key words are **Chosen** and **Predestined**, and it begs questions of what God's up to—does God literally pick and choose people to be in his family like the team captain in a kickball game? Do we have no choice but to either be picked by God or not picked and chosen by God?

But wait, don't we have free will and real choices that we get to make and indeed have to make in order to embrace a life of faith?

This is a classic issue that Christians have wrestled with for centuries, let's take a quick crack at this, and if you want to nerd out on a more in-depth theological conversation drop me an email and we'll get coffee this week and talk about it

One of the big-picture questions is simply **how much does God determine?** How much does God dictate things will happen in just such a way

And part of what's tricky about this is you can look at different stories in the Bible and make a case either way—sometimes, God seems to step way back and just let things unfold however they will

And at other points in the biblical story it looks like God is super-hands on and essentially making absolutely sure that something goes down just so.

I've wrestled with this at various points, here's where I am right now:

let's put it on a scale—1 being essentially God just winds everything up, gets it started, and then steps back and has almost no involvement at all in this world—this is essentially **Deism**—there's a God but he's kind of far off and distant
at the other end of the spectrum, 10 is essentially that every single thing including the color of socks you wore this morning was predetermined by God or fate (**Fatalism**)

I think 1 and 10 are outside the bounds of the biblical understanding of God, and just about everything else from 2-9 could be true at any given time or in any given situation

Let's get more specific and talk about it in terms of **coming to faith**—let's take a couple of passes at this

First, the Bible without much hesitation or worry both affirms that God is the one who initiates and calls us into his family--adoption always depends more on the parents than the children, right?

AND that we have a role to play in receiving God's grace and responding to it, embracing it, integrating it, living it out

But the one thing that the Scriptures do say clearly is that God is always the initiator, the primary actor in the story.

C.S. Lewis put it this way: if Shakespeare were ever to meet a character in one of the plays that he wrote, it would be more Shakespeare's doing than Hamlet's or Romeo and Juliet's.

In nearly every story of people coming to faith, there are incidents or people or influences that are outside the control of the person coming to faith that are a part of the process of that person.

Some of you are here considering faith, not sure about faith, asking questions maybe for the first time

And for a few of you, if someone had told you 6 months ago or a year or two ago that you'd be in a church of any sort looking into faith, you'd have laughed at them

But you're here now, most likely through a chain of events that you did not foresee or ask for and I want to propose to you that you're here because God's after you, chasing after you in spite of your ongoing resistance! He loves you that much.

Another way for us to come at this idea of being chosen is by looking at the bigger story of the Scriptures

In order to understand these two words of **Chosen** and **Predestined**, we have to get our minds around a couple of other words Paul uses: **Holy and Blameless, Adoption as sons, Forgiven, Redemption**

And the reason why these words are important is because all of them or variations of them were used in the Old Testament for the nation of Israel

One of the ongoing questions that many of us have about the Bible is what to do with the Old Testament, why do we still need it is something that folks will occasionally ask me

But remember every one of the New Testament writers were Jews who LOVED the old testament

and they were constantly drawing on the images and the categories and the words and the theology of the OT as they wrote their letters and biographies of Jesus

And Paul is adamant that what God has done in Jesus Christ is to fulfill all the Old Testament promises to the Jewish people

and in doing that, Paul believes that God is pouring his blessing to all people everywhere.

And these words and/or ideas over and over and over again are all used throughout the Old Testament for the people of Israel

That Paul is now using as a Jewish Jesus follower to describe the church in Ephesus, who are not all Jewish but a mixture of Jews and non-Jews

So let's do a quick trip into the OT to see what it meant that the people of Israel were chosen and adopted by God

Way back in the first book of the Bible in Genesis 12 you get the establishment of the nation of Israel

And it comes by God choosing a man named Abram—and God doesn't pick him because he's so polished or so religious or faithful or good

We get lots of Abram's story and at points he's extremely faithful to God and at points he's kind of a mess

But God just picks this man and he gives him this promise:

***"I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;***

***I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.^[a]***

***³I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;***

***and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.”***

This is the promise that eventually and to this day becomes the Jewish people, the nation of Israel

Okay, so what's God up to here? First, obviously: great nation, going to bless you, your name will be great, and all those around you will be blessed or cursed by God based on how they relate to you

But ultimately, what's the goal and point and purpose of God's choosing Abram? Ultimately the goal of this all is that all the people on earth would be blessed through you, Abram.

This was repeated throughout the OT: Israel, I'm *choosing you to be my adopted son*, I'm going to *redeem you* out of slavery in Egypt, I'm going to make you *holy, set apart*, all these words that Paul is using in Ephesians

But why was Israel chosen and why was God doing all this work? So that all peoples might be blessed through them, later God says that they're to be a light to the nations, bearing witness to the goodness of the creator God

The chosen ones were chosen for the sake of the not-yet chosen ones. The chosen ones were chosen to be a people who displayed God's goodness and grace and mercy

To be chosen by God is not to be chosen for a club but for a mission. To be adopted and made holy is to be set apart of a work that God has for his people to do: through you all the nations will be blessed

The Jewish people throughout the OT were called God's chosen people.

But here in Ephesians, Paul is explicitly writing to a group of non-Jews and declaring that because of what Christ has done, that status of being chosen by God is no longer dictated by ethnicity or confined to one people-group

And this work of Christ that breaks through racial and ethnic barriers to bring unity to bring all peoples into the family of God, that theme gets sounded over and over and over again through Ephesians, we'll come back to that later in the series.

Now, because of Christ, all nations and people groups might be chosen and brought into God's family for the sake of those who are not-yet chosen, to serve and love and minister to them

And so we are here, a group of people made up mostly of non-Jewish descent declaring boldly that what God has done in Jesus Christ is pour lavish gifts on all humanity—grace, forgiveness, redemption, love—gifts that we have to choose to accept and embrace and walk in

and we declare that we have been chosen to receive those gifts IN ORDER to be an instrument of blessing and mission and to invite others to receive God's gifts as well.

Several weeks ago we sent a team to Honduras to build a house and run Vacation Bible School for kids alongside some missionaries:

through you, Chatham Community Church, all the nations of the earth will be blessed

Two weeks ago, instead of our usual worship service we went and did service projects all across the county—through you, Chatham Community Church, all of Chatham County and beyond will be blessed

Several weeks ago, we hosted an exploring Christianity class for people who are considering faith, had over 15 people from our church who participated in one of those 5 weeks of classes

Many of them came initially to Chatham Community Church because one of YOU invited them. Thank you!!

Most all of them have been loved and served here by you, thank you!

Through you, Chatham Community Church, all of Chatham County and beyond will be blessed.

God has acted in our lives, he has chosen us

we have responded and embraced a life of faith, said yes to being his children.

AND NOW we are about the work of bearing witness to the glorious grace of God to those whom we believe and trust with great confidence that same God is pursuing and calling

We are chosen to be a blessing, called to be the Lord's for the sake of those who do not yet know the Lord

And over all of this, we come back to the core concept, the larger truth that Paul is communicating to this rag-tag group of new Christians in Ephesus: you are wanted.

You are wanted by God, in his family by his lavish love and grace poured out through Jesus directly to you.

This is the bedrock truth that frees us to live lives of faith, hope, and love

rather than lives driven by insecurity or pride or ambition or guilt or shame or people-pleasing or trying to prove yourself to yourself or your parents or God or anyone else!

You are wanted and chosen by God for this road trip

you don't have to pass an entrance exam, you don't have to clean yourself up, there's no pre-requisites or cost or price you have to pay

It's all grace that God chooses us right where we are, before we've cleaned ourselves up, and he adopts us into his family

Steve Tamayo and I were talking about this passage last week and he had a great distinction that I want to share.

He was saying it's a big difference to be wanted versus being welcome.

If your family had a big graduation celebration for someone in the past few weeks, there was likely a large portion of the crowd at your celebration who were welcome to be there

But there were likely just a few folks who you really, really WANTED to be there
it wouldn't have been a real celebration without them there, they were vital to the experience of the celebration, crucial in your world or in the

To be welcome is one thing, and it's wonderful
But to be specifically wanted, that's another level of intentionality and deliberateness.

You are wanted. You are chosen. You do not have to live edgy, insecure, anxious, striving, fearful, lives.

You have been chosen by God to be a part of his family and in that chosen-ness, there is both gift as well as responsibility to be a blessing to the nations, starting with the people right around you.

TAKE-WITH:

How does it re-frame what's most important and most urgent in your life today that God has chosen you (to be a blessing)?

All of us came into today with issues and situations and circumstances or problems that are urgent or important or both:

your job, your marriage, your family, your health, your finances, the lawn needs to be mowed this afternoon, whatever it is—can you bring that to the surface right now? Some of you it's already been on the surface, you haven't heard a word I said, that's alright, I've been there!

But now I want to invite you to take whatever that issue or situation or relationship or problem is and I want you to put out your hand

And you've been thinking about it or approaching it from all types of angles, maybe you've been churning about it or scheming or having conversations in your head in all sorts of ways

But right now, I want you to put it in the palm of your hand, and I want you to look at it from the perspective of this question:

how does it reframe this issue today that matters and is very important, but how does the fact that God has chosen you to be a blessing to others re-frame and change your perspective on how you might approach and handle this situation?

Depending on where you are spiritually, you'll need to focus on different parts of this sentence

For those of you who are asking questions and exploring faith, I want to propose to you that you're here because God has chosen to come after you, to start to awaken you

And I want to invite you to embrace his choice of pursuing you, embrace faith, and as you do that, watch how that re-frames this thing in your hands to be chosen by God to be a blessing to others

Still for others of you, you'd call yourself a Christian but you've struggled to really settle in, to know that you're wanted.

You've felt a bit more like someone that maybe God kind of puts up with rather than someone that God wants to be on the road trip with

This week, I want to invite you to take this passage of Scripture and recite this over and over and over again: "I have been chosen. I have been chosen. I have been chosen. God wants to be with me"

And beyond just the abstract idea of being chosen, I want you to recite that good news over and in the midst of this thing you've got in your hands and allow God's grace and initiative to re-frame it!

Still others of you, you've got no problems with that. You're pretty confident in your place in God's family, you're pretty secure in that

So the question for you is, what does it mean for you to be a blessing to others this week? God has lavished all those gifts we looked at on you. The one to whom much is given much is expected.

What difference does it make that you've been chosen in order to be a blessing to all those around you, particularly those who haven't yet been chosen?

As we hit week 2 of our summer road trip through Ephesians, hear this good news: God wants you in the car for this road trip. He's chosen you, pursuing you, wanting you to get in the car and see where he'll take you

My prayer is that we'd all receive the great gift of being wanted and then live into the call to be a blessing to those around us.

PRAY

Close with budget meeting instructions