

Growing Up in Jesus series ~ A Study of Ephesians

Wk 5: *Designed for Glorious Living* - (Drawing from Eugene Peterson's *Practice Resurrection*)

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This is an amazing portion of Ephesians. We've been working from the main themes of Ephesians out to the whole letter, so we're now at the opening verses. And this section, verses 3-14 is actually one sentence in the original Greek. Yes, 201 words beginning with "blessed" and ending with "glory." Blessed to glory. That about sums up the Christian Life as I understand it. That is after Easter resurrection world we live in. Paul is a bit playful as he tells us what is going on in our God-created, Jesus-saved, Spirit-blessed world. This is where we are were born and where we are growing up. This is home.

In this after Easter resurrection world, our lives are not hand to mouth: the sunsets are vast, the heavens are high, the oceans are deep. The cosmos is designed for our glorious living. You have any doubt? Well Paul does his best to prevent us from reducing our worldview to a less than lavish world. Sin shrinks our imaginations, but Paul's holy poetry stretches our imaginations back to God's size.

If we are going to grow mature in Jesus, we need God's conditions that allow it. So we need room. The Ephesian letter gives us the room we need, as Eugene Peterson says, "*Ephesians plunges us into ocean deeps, and we come up gasping for air. This is going to take some*

getting used to.” If you need to grow your world for glorious living, read Ephesians. On New Year’s Eve many said they were going to “Party like it’s 1999,” because they needed a big new, fresh start in 2021. As we still try to reach that, you owe yourself the dignity of reading Ephesians. Maybe start with the Message paraphrase and ingest some of Paul’s playfulness.

Paul’s start of his letter, these verses 3-14, orient us in the world. We need this. They orient us in the cosmos. This single 201 word sentence speaks of the central action of the cosmos, God at work in salvation ways. We are not lost in the cosmos in 2021. We CAN find our way in it. We CAN find our way home. We were designed for glorious living. The cosmos was designed for glorious living, not anything less.

Now as we look at these verses, we are going to structure our study of them by focusing on the verbs. There are seven verbs in this long sentence. *Blessed...chose...destined...bestowed...lavished...made known...gather up...* Let’s let these orient us to the central action of the cosmos.

Verb ONE: God blessed. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.” (Eph. 1:3).

In the Christian life, blessing picks up steam: God blessing Abraham in Genesis 12; David blessing God; Mary

identified as blessed; Jesus blessing the children; children praying a blessing over a meal; the cultural reflex of “bless you” when someone sneezes; parents blessing their children; our worship service closing with a blessing before we depart. Blessing is part of our experience. Thank you, Father, Jesus, and Holy Spirit.

Verb TWO: God chose. “**Just as he chose us in Christ before the foundations of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love**” (Eph. 1:4).

Everyone has a story from some point in their life of not being chosen. Not being chosen for a team, not being chosen for a job, not chosen as a spouse. That “not chosen” carries the message that *I’m not useful*, that *I’m good for nothing*.

And how do we respond? At least at first, we often don’t take it lying down. We insist on being notice. Some develop the persona of being a bully. Some get expelled from class. Some go to jail. Some just die their hair blue. No one with a well placed tattoo is invisible anymore.

These may work for a time, but they don’t have much staying power. We all have had or have experiences of not being noticed, of being ignored, of being dismissed as unimportant, a wallflower, so the verb “chose” is a breath of fresh air: God chose us.

Yes, *GOD* chose us. It wasn't a last-minute thing because He felt sorry for us and no one else would have us. He gladly chose us "before the foundation of the world." We are in on the action of the cosmos, long before we had any idea that we are in on the action. I like this, Eugene Peterson says, "We are cosmic." Go home thinking that today. "I am cosmic." "You are cosmic."

Verb THREE: God *destined*. "He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace" (Eph. 1:5-6).

Both "destined" and "chosen" carry a sense of intention. Life is not random. God notices, identifies us, and chooses us. God chooses and destines. You aren't set loose in the cosmos to find your place and your way in it as best you can. God has a purpose for you and chose you for it.

I like how English Cardinal John Newman describes this,

God has created me to do Him some definite service.

He has committed some work to me, which He has not committed to another.

I have my mission -- I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next.

I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for nothing. I shall do good. I shall do His work. Therefore, I will trust Him, whatever, wherever I am. I cannot be thrown away.

If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him; in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about...

Being chosen develops into a relationship, for were chosen for adoption as His children. There was and is more to being destined than getting you and me to heaven. We were destined for adoption as His children. So what do we do? We open our hands and receive. Receive, because none of us can conform God to our image. Receive, because none of us can use God for selfish purposes. Receive, because none of us can put God in a small box the size of a building. We cannot grasp God on any other terms than God has given us a cosmos to live in and enjoy. And we receive, because none of us has access to the blueprint for reality, the blueprint for the how and when of the central action of the cosmos.

Yet a great deal of speculation occurs, a lot of guessing as to exactly what God's plans might be. And this might concern us, so "*I don't miss the will of God for my life.*" But this anxiety doesn't make for growing up in Jesus. Now to say we're destined, makes us kinda want to know, "what for?" But the tone of *destined* Paul writes with is rescued from an impersonal fate. More like rescued from astrology charts and from fated to karma. I believe Paul's *destined for adoption*, you might say predestined, is not about exclusivity, it is not about "who is in and who is out." It is about those to first receive the gospel to share the

gospel. It's about alerting those who are first to arrive at the adoption party to get their phones and start texting others to come in and join the party.

I refer you to Leslie Newbigan's comments on predestined in his book *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Not exclusive, just the first to start celebrating. Blessed to be a blessing, we might say. And "the first to set our hope on Christ," as verse 12 says.

Verb FOUR: God bestowed. "...**grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved**" (Eph. 1:6).

This is really big and extravagant what Paul is talking about. We need to make ourselves aware of the grandness of the world in which we are growing up in Jesus. Eugene Peterson writes, "*Every part of the landscape, every shift in the weather, every conversation, every person we meet, every book we read provides a different and unique slant on what is involved: God's grace activated, God's grace in motion - is us. It isn't our business to figure this out or catalogue it or master it. Get used to abundance. Lavish abundance of grace.*"

Verb FIVE: God lavished. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us" (Eph. 1:7-8).

Lavish is one of Paul's favorite words. We might say he uses it lavishly. Does Paul overdo it? I don't think so. In

matters of God's grace, exaggerations, hyperboles, are still very much understatements. God's grace is lavishly lavish.

Verb SIX: God *made known*. **“With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will” (Eph. 1:8-9).**

We are not in the dark about this. We are in on what God does. We are not intended to be kept in a state of ignorance. We are not children “to be seen and not heard”. We can ask questions.

So what's the mystery of His will? The “mystery” Paul is describing is elaborated in verse 10, **“as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth”** (Eph. 1:10). The way in which God makes known this mystery is **“with all wisdom and insight.”** This is personal again, remember, not impersonal knowledge, this is relational and about growing up in Jesus. We truly know something only by entering it, knowing it from the inside, lovingly embracing it. We are not in the dark about God's plan to rescue us in Jesus, to heal the brokenness sin causes, and to bring us home to our Father's house. This is the cosmos we live in.

Verb SEVEN: God *gathers up*. **“...to gather up all things in him [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth”** (Eph. 1:10).

“Gather up” is the summary verb of this long sentence. This puts us as insiders in the cosmos. If we review these

seven verbs, we see Jesus is the One who reveals and executes each of these actions. And given the performative power of His Word, He succeeds. Eleven times He is named and eleven times we are personally included by “our,” “us,” and “we.” We are included in this huge cosmic-sized glorious, after Easter resurrection living. This then orients us in the world.

There is not a single item in this practice of resurrection, this life of growing to maturity, that takes place impersonally, or generally, or abstractly. Make God a moral force and His Church an organization with its own goals, and you can do what you want. But keep God personal and you get what He gives: glorious living.

When I watch the news, it seems we find any way we can to get control of God, our neighbors, or ourselves. We humans are relentless in wanting control. We depersonalize God to an idea to be discussed. We define ourselves as consumers on Sundays wanting to be satisfied, rather than brothers and sisters in Christ happy to be together again. The more we do these, the more we incapacitate ourselves. The more we prevent ourselves from growing mature in Jesus with lives of love and worship, trust and sacrifice.

But Paul doesn't pause with even a comma or semicolon. He keeps these seven verbs - showing God in person, God in action - in our sights so that we keep our resurrection lives in focus.

Pauls' summarizing verb "gather up" is quite complete. The heart of the verb is the metaphor, "head": put everything under the one head, that is under Jesus, of which we are His body. Instead of "just one thing after another," we have unity. Instead of a cosmos in chaos and clutter, there is Jesus holding it together in coherence and unity.

Heads have a way of keeping our orientation. We don't want to lose our heads. Heads also make us personal and relational. Chickens with their heads cut off are disconnected, they're a mess. We all need a good head on our shoulders. I think this is the perfect metaphor for living. Jesus our Head. This is not hierarchical. This is how we live the glorious life: Jesus holding all things together.

Jesus our Head is a good picture to keep in mind: there's wisdom and maturity and orientation and unity in that picture. Through Jesus' work, Ephesians says, we become whole, healthy, unified and complete with Him as our Head. This is a glorious Headship and a glorious grace. Paul introduces that phrase here to describe the resurrection life in the cosmos. And he repeats it three times.

"He destined us...to the praise of his glorious grace." (Eph. 1:5-6)

“...so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory.” (1:12)

“...marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit ... to the praise of his glory.” (1:13-14)

Everything takes place in grateful celebration of God’s presence in the cosmos. This is our hope, this is what we were made for: a grand celebration celebrating the full glorious presence of God.

This introductory sentence to Ephesians places us in a cosmos in which God starts everything. There is not a single verb here commanding us to do something, as it orients us to glorious living, not so much as a hint or suggestion that we are to do anything at all. No requirements, no laws, no chores, no assignments, no lessons. We are born into a cosmos in which all the requirements and conditions for growing up are not only in place but in action.

Once we get this through our heads, we are out of the driver’s seat forever. The practice of resurrection is not a do-it-yourself, self-help project. It is God’s project, and He is engaged full-time in carrying it out. This rescues us from immature assumptions that we better get busy finding a way to make it happen.

We are told in no uncertain terms that each of us is wonderfully included in all seven verbs of God’s doing. No

verb leaves us out of the action. We were picked for this before we were even born. We are not spectators of a cosmic plan, we are in the plan. But we are not running it. All the conditions that make it possible for us to grow up to maturity, to the stature of Jesus with Him as our Head, are in place, even from **“before the foundation of the world.”**

But while we don't run the show, we do need to open our hands. We need to develop a receptivity to what God is doing in our lives and the world. All of the resurrection life is a gift. “Grace is everywhere.” We now receive. And that is our primary response if we are to find ourselves at home in the cosmos. The only question to ask is what Paul asked the Ephesians in Acts 19:2. It still reverberates.

“Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?”