

Small Group Study Guide: Ephesians 1:3-14

"The Cascading Waterfall of God's Grace"

OPENING PRAYER & ICEBREAKER (10 minutes)

Icebreaker Question:

Share about a time when you received something you didn't earn or deserve. How did it make you feel?

SCRIPTURE READING (5 minutes)

Have someone read Ephesians 1:3-14 aloud. Encourage the group to listen for words or phrases that stand out.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE SERMON

1. ****Salvation is like a river**** - it has a source far upstream in God's eternal plan, not in our decision or effort.
2. ****Every spiritual blessing is already ours in Christ**** - we don't earn God's favor; we live in the favor already given.
3. ****The Trinity works together for our salvation:****
 - The Father planned it (chose and predestined us)
 - The Son purchased it (redeemed us through His blood)
 - The Spirit secures it (seals us as God's possession)
4. ****God's ultimate goal is "the praise of His glory"***** - our good and God's glory are perfectly aligned.
5. ****We are sealed and guaranteed**** - the Holy Spirit is God's down payment, ensuring He will complete what He started.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Section 1: The Father's Sovereign Grace (verses 3-6)

1. **Understanding Election:** Paul says God "chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" (v. 4). How does knowing that God chose you before you were born affect your sense of security in your salvation?
2. **Adoption, Not Just Forgiveness:** Paul uses the language of adoption (v. 5). What's the difference between being forgiven and being adopted? How does understanding yourself as an adopted child of God change your identity?
3. **Holy and Blameless:** God chose us to be "holy and blameless before Him" (v. 4). This is both our position in Christ and our calling. Where do you struggle most with living out holiness in your daily life?

Section 2: The Son's Redeeming Blood (verses 7-12)

4. **The Cost of Grace:** Verse 7 says we have redemption "through His blood." Why is it important that our redemption required Jesus' blood rather than just God declaring us forgiven?
5. **Lavished Grace:** Paul says God "lavished" grace on us (v. 8). Does your daily experience of God feel like He's being stingy or lavish? What might need to change in your perspective?
6. **The Mystery Revealed:** God's plan is "to unite all things in Him" (v. 10). How does knowing that all of history is moving toward Christ's ultimate victory give you hope in difficult times?

Section 3: The Spirit's Sealing (verses 13-14)

7. **Sealed and Secured:** The Holy Spirit is described as a "seal" and a "guarantee" (vv. 13-14). Have you ever doubted your salvation? How does this passage speak to those doubts?

8. **The Down Payment:** The Spirit is called a "pledge" or down payment of our inheritance. What evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence do you see in your life right now?

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Personal Reflection Questions:

1. **Getting Off the Performance Treadmill:** The sermon said, "the Christian life is not about earning God's favor but walking in a favor already given." In what areas of your life are you still trying to earn God's approval? What would it look like to rest in His grace instead?

2. **Facing Your Circumstances:** The pastor acknowledged that we sometimes struggle to believe God is good and loving when difficult things happen. What current situation in your life is challenging your trust in God's goodness? How can this passage help you trust Him even when you don't understand?

3. **Living for His Glory:** Three times Paul says everything is "to the praise of His glory." If your life this week was evaluated on whether it brought praise to God's glory, what would the assessment be? What's one specific change you could make?

GROUP ACTIVITIES

Option 1: Gratitude Exercise

Go around the circle and have each person complete this sentence:

"Because of what Christ has done, I am no longer _____, but now I am _____."

Option 2: Prayer Partners

Break into pairs. Share one area where you're trying to earn God's favor instead of resting in grace. Pray for each other to experience the freedom of God's lavish grace this week.

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE

Choose one of the following to practice this week:

1. **Memorize Ephesians 1:7-8** - Write it on a card and read it each morning as a reminder of God's lavish grace.

2. **Journal Your Blessings** - Each day, write down one "spiritual blessing" you have in Christ (forgiveness, adoption, redemption, etc.) and thank God for it.

3. **Share Your Story** - Tell someone this week about what God has done for you in Christ. Focus on His grace, not your performance.

4. **Identify Performance Patterns** - Pay attention to moments when you feel like you need to earn God's love. Stop and remind yourself: "I am already chosen, redeemed, and sealed."

CLOSING REFLECTION

The River Illustration:

The sermon opened with the image of the St. Mary's River flowing with no defined beginning or end. Your salvation is like that river - it started before you were born in the heart of God, and it will flow into eternity.

Final Question:

How does viewing your salvation as a river that began in God's eternal plan (rather than in your decision) change the way you view your relationship with Him?

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray together, thanking God for:

- Choosing us before the foundation of the world
- Redeeming us through Christ's blood
- Sealing us with His Holy Spirit
- Working all things according to His will for our good and His glory

Ask God to help each person rest in His grace and live this week "to the praise of His glory."

LEADER NOTES

- This passage is theologically rich. Don't feel pressure to answer every question perfectly. Create space for honest wrestling with difficult concepts.
- Some may struggle with the doctrine of election/predestination. Emphasize both God's sovereignty and human responsibility as the Bible does.
- Keep bringing the conversation back to grace and assurance. The goal is for people to leave amazed by God's love, not confused by theology.
- Be prepared to share your own struggles with performance-based Christianity to model vulnerability.