

The Church Defined: Ephesians

Part 4

Ephesians 1:3-14, 1:15-23, 2:1-9, 3:1-7

1. Power.

- Ephesians 1:18-21, 3:7, 3:16-18, 3:20, 6:10

2. Riches.

- Ephesians 1:7, 1:18, 2:6-7, 3:8, 3:16

3. Purpose.

- Ephesians 1:11, 2:15, 3:10-11

4. Reconciliation.

- Ephesians 2:13-17, 4:3, 4:12-13

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The Church Defined

Ephesians

Well, this is it. This is the last Sunday you will sit in this room as it looks like this. Starting next Sunday, we will worship in the Gym for about a month and a half. And when we come back, this room will have new carpet, new paint, and new seating! It will be much more comfortable and updated.

As exciting as that might be, it's also sad, isn't it? There are fifty years of amazing things that have happened while the people of West Valley Church have been sitting in these pews. But I assure you, those amazing things won't go away; they will always be part of our story.

We just had a great meeting at 9am where we went into all the details of why we are updating things and the process we went through to get here. I won't repeat myself, but let me summarize: We spent years exploring different options. One of those options we looked at was refurbishing these seats, but unfortunately it was going to be far more expensive to refurbish these than it would be to replace them, and that would not be a wise use of all the money you give to the church. Switching to the new seating, it will not only be far more comfortable for you and for our guests, but we'll also be able to increase the seating capacity in this room without having to spend all the money of tearing down and extending walls, which we don't intend to do. We need to maximize the space we have.

By the way, a few of the smaller pews will be available if you want one – or for a donation – so please let us know today if you do, and which one, and we'll do our best to set it aside for you.

But I know – even though it all makes sense, it's still hard. I understand that! I really do. There have been many wonderful things that have happened as people sat in these seats over the last fifty years. But let me ask you: did those things happen because of God or because of the pews? Those are GOD stories, not pew stories. They will be with us no matter what we sit in. They won't ever go away. They will always be part of your life and will always be in the story of West Valley Church. Those memories and stories won't go away. But now we have the chance to see God create new stories for future generations! Amen?

That's why we are asking you to share your stories so we can celebrate them together, and they will encourage us and turn our attention to all the stories to come!

Please: share with us a story of what God has done in your life here at West Valley Church (ushers).

What God has done in your life is an important part of our story and we'd like to hear it. Please take the time to write it down. We will read, display, and compile these for all of us.

You can fill it out during the sermon – I don't mind! We'll collect those at the end. And if you'd like us to follow up with you, put your name and contact information on it. We will do video stories with some of you.

That's why this is the perfect time for us to talk about what it means for us to be the church – to keep the main thing the main thing. Because this is not a sacred place; this is a place where sacred things happen. These are not sacred seats; they are seats in which sacred things happened. We don't go to church; we are the church. That's because church isn't a place we go to; it is who we are. It is how we live. We have the same power that raised Christ from the grave living in us. Church is not about location; it's about relation: our relation to God and each other. This is a powerful thing that we are!

So today, we are going to see this with an overview of the New Testament letter to the Ephesians. This will help us get a correct view of who we are and what we do. Because 69 years ago, God put this church on this corner in this community for what he wants to do in and through us today!

So today let's get a Google Earth view of the book of Ephesians. You might ask why: why are we taking time to look in this particular book? That's an important question. Generally, it's a great part of the New Testament because it is the Apostle Paul's theology paper on the church—it's the heart of Paul's preachings, writings, teachings, and in fact his whole life's mission, and I think you will see that. We'll see how it applies to us—you and me, West Valley Church.

The book of Ephesians was written by the Apostle Paul in about 61 or 62 AD. At the time he wrote it, he was imprisoned in Rome. He wrote it just about five or six years before he was beheaded by the Emperor Nero.

This particular letter is different than all the other letters or epistles that Paul wrote. In every other New Testament letter he wrote, Paul was writing to a specific church to address a specific problem. In other words, there was some kind of false teaching, some kind of threat, some kind of serious sin going on and Paul wrote to correct it. But *not* in Ephesians. Instead, Paul is giving us his greatest work on what it means to be the church. It is the clearest and highest example of Paul's ecclesiology—that means theology of the church. This is Paul's attempt to articulate the beauty and the mystery and wonder of God's work in us – the church. In fact, it probably wasn't written to the church in Ephesus, but was written to be circulated among several churches, and more than likely Ephesus ended up with the last copy and it was credited as being sent to them.

In this letter Paul, on the one hand, attempts to unpack the secrets of God's plan for the church, and on the other, he describes how we live out being the church in the day-to-day details of life. At times he's almost mundane. Other times, he gets so carried away that if he was speaking, you would wonder if he would ever stop to take a breath. In fact, he has a real problem with run-on sentences. In the original Greek language, which is what Paul wrote it in, watch this: In chapter one, in the original Greek, verses 3-14 is all one sentence. So are verses 15-23. The first nine verses of chapter two are all one sentence. As are chapter three, verses one through seven. It's as though he gets so caught up in describing the indescribable gift of the church that there aren't enough words or long enough sentences. He gets so worked up that he writes a prayer of benediction—a kind of

doxology, in the middle of the letter in chapter three. Those usually come at the *end* of the letters. He writes this beautiful benediction prayer of praise and then realizes he still has three more chapters to write.

In this single letter Paul spells out our destiny (to be united in Christ), and our supreme task as the church (that we are the *ONLY* means of reconciling people to each other and to God). It really is breathtaking!

Well, having said all of that, I have found four key themes of this great letter of scripture that are the fundamental things we were made for as individuals and as a church. And the first is...

1. Power

We have a built-in hunger for power. We all have this internal mechanism for power. And power corrupts. Don't think so? I don't know if you noticed or not, but we recently had a national election. Talk about people and groups trying to gain or keep power. Now we are in the middle of confirmation hearings for the president's appointees. Those aren't interviews; they are theater for people to bully each other and show who has more power.

The thing is, we were *built* for power – it's built into us by God. But the problem is, because of sin, we think the power is supposed to be *ours*. *But it never was ours*. We were built to house *God's power*. That desire for power we have is the remnants of God's original plan for us, which was to find our source of power in Him. Listen to the ways that Paul describes it for us:

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power (*listen!*) is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. (Ephesians 1:18-21, niv)

Let me give you an example of the contrast between man's power and God's. Back in 2004, I was on Northwest Nazarene University's Board of Trustees for Idaho, and I attended the commencement ceremony that year. The guest speaker was Idaho's Senator, Larry Craig. Craig at that time was the elder senator on the appropriations committee. One of the trustees that was sitting by me leaned over to me and said, "You don't get much more power than that." He was right. Craig gave an excellent speech about the reality that the United States alone has the greatest power in the world. A vivid example of man's greatest power.

But it was just three years later that Senator Craig was arrested for lewd conduct in the Minneapolis airport. He thought he was so powerful that he was above the law and common decency. The story is that, when the arresting officer brought him in, Craig gave him his business card that identified himself as a US Senator, and said, "What do you think of that?! Do you even know who I am?"

Contrast Senator Craig with the song we sang at that commencement ceremony: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty, perfect in power.” Or think about that old, great hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.” What a contrast in power!

We were never meant to *own* power, but we were meant to be a conduit of God’s power. *Power isn’t supposed to form in us, it’s supposed to flow through us.* This is what Paul is trying to say to us: that the church is the conduit of God’s power on earth. Listen to Paul:

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of (God’s) power. (Ephesians 3:7, niv)

And then Paul prays for us:

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, (Ephesians 3:16-18, niv)

Then Paul clarifies just *whose* power it is that is at work in us when he says:

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power (3x) that is at work within us. (Ephesians 3:20, niv)

Paul wraps it all up by telling us:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. (Ephesians 6:10, niv)

Whose power?

There is an amazing power that is within us as a church to accomplish God’s purposes, and we haven’t even begun to tap into it yet!

The second key thought is...

2. Riches

Game shows. Casinos. Lotteries. Wall Street greed and corporate corruption. We hunger for wealth. But, like power, our lust for money is the sinful perversion of what God had first intended. Listen, because this is key: *all* material things, *all* that we could ever possess, *everything* is the sole property of God. And God intends for us to be stewards of it. That means we get to enjoy its use. But it is not ours; it is God’s. God’s wealth serves only two purposes. One is to meet the needs of ourselves and family. The second is to meet the needs of others. All riches of every kind—financial, physical, even spiritual, are poured out lavishly on us by a generous God, but not for us to hoard it or worship it. It is to meet our needs, and for us to use as a blessing to others. That’s why the giving of tithes and offerings every Sunday is so important; it is an act of worship. We give generously to remind ourselves that it all belongs to God, and we trust the church to facilitate its use to meet needs. And by the way, we know how important it is that you can trust us. Your leaders fully understand how important it is to be transparent and accountable and to be good stewards of what you give. Melissa Peart is our Business Administrator, and she works with your board-appointed treasurer. Every month they give a detailed report to the

finance team – a group of experienced people who check every budget line every month. That report is then given to the church board to review. The report is part of our public record. And we have an annual external audit to make sure everything is done honestly and correctly. All of that is to keep those in leadership from being corrupted by riches. We take it seriously.

But really, the fact is that worldly riches are not the real issue. The true riches we have are found in our relationship with Christ. In Ephesians, Paul is trying to get our eyes off of these treasures on earth and help us see the immense treasures we have in Christ. He says:

In Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace. (Ephesians 1:7, niv)

And Paul prays that we might know and experience these riches:

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints. (Ephesians 1:18, niv)

When Jesus died on the cross, he knew that by rising from the dead he would make the riches of his Father available to you! Paul tells us:

God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:6-7, niv)

Paul knew his purpose was to let everyone know the generous riches of Christ, because he says:

Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people (*notice he has given up his power*), this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ. (Ephesians 3:8, niv)

And it is now our purpose as well: to have these riches right out of heaven's treasures and use them and share them here on earth. That's why Paul writes:

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being. (Ephesians 3:16, niv)

We have access to God's glorious riches!

Calvin Miller was an author, pastor, and speaker, and he wrote a magnificent trilogy allegory about the gospels, the book of Acts, and the book of Revelation called The Singer (Jesus), The Song (the spreading of the message in Acts) and The Finale (Revelation). I remember numerous quotes from those books, but here's a great one:

"The world is poor because her fortune is buried in the sky and all her treasure maps are of the earth." (repeat) Oh the bottomless treasure at our fingertips! It is all ours if we will find our treasure in heaven!

What you really want, what you were made for, is God's power and his riches in Christ.

The next key thing God has for the church, and that people instinctively want, is...

3. Purpose

We all want to have some reason for being, some sense that we have lived a life of impact, that we've made some kind of difference. Unfortunately we often look for that in harmful ways. Think about how we yearn to be celebrities or social media influencers, and we worship those that we think are. The result is according to research – especially in younger people, “Symptoms of depression and anxiety. Lower levels of critical thinking and cognitive abilities impaired social skills. Maladaptive daydreaming that interferes with work, school, or relationships. Desire for fame, which is often linked with a lack of self-acceptance. Compulsive buying and materialism. Difficulties with romantic relationships.”¹ Looking for purpose in the wrong places ultimately hurts ourselves.

That innate desire for purpose is just a symptom of what you and I are really made for, which is to fulfill our destiny—having a life that makes a Kingdom of God impact that lasts forever and ever!

God has had this amazing plan for you since before the beginning of time! Both individually and together here at West Valley Church, at this time and in this place, God has planned for you to fulfill your destiny! This church is poised with purpose-filled power and riches! Instead of a short-term Instagram influencer, you will be an eternal impact influencer! Listen to how Paul describes it:

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.
(Ephesians 1:11, niv)

Again Paul says that God brought us together for this:

His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of two, thus making peace. (Ephesians 2:15, niv)

We'll talk more about that in a moment, but it is a part of our purpose that together, through His power, we would literally show West Valley (and from here the whole world) what it means and how it feels and what it looks like to know and live together with God in Christ! The Word of God in Ephesians says:

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Ephesians 3:10-11, niv)

We have a great purpose!

I'm telling you, we have an eternal purpose, planned for us on God's drawing board right there in the blueprints of the universe. God intends to rescue thousands through us! Power, Riches, Purpose, and finally...

¹ Donna Rockwell, “Celebrity Worship And The American Mind,” HuffPost (1-9-17); Editor, “The Connection Between Celebrity Worship Syndrome and Teen Mental Health,” Newport Academy (4-6-21)

4. Reconciliation

This is about a sense of belonging—of knowing that we are loved and accepted, that someone likes us for who we are. It means we don't have to pretend we're something we're not. Belonging is something we all need. Do you know what the number one reason is that kids join gangs? To belong. As lethal as it is, they'll do it because they are accepted into a family. We all want to have the security that comes from belonging. But what we really want is what we don't have—a belonging relationship with God. That's because we have alienated ourselves because of sin. That is exactly why Christ died in your place—to reconcile you to God, so you could have that ultimate need for relationship reconciled. Ephesians says:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. (Ephesians 2:13-17, niv)

We have been reconciled to God by Christ, and then through him to each other. So it's absolutely critical that as the church we practice reconciliation – that we live out reconciliation:

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.
(Ephesians 4:3, niv)

We are a living example of reconciliation.

Here's the clincher: We are supposed to live it so *clearly*, so strongly, that the world will see something in us that they can't see anywhere else; something that they can have, too. We're not building fences to keep that "evil" world out of the church; we are building bridges to get everyone into the church! God's primary means of reconciling the world to himself is by the church—you and me together— showing the world our unity and offering it to them in Christ, too. WE are God's primary means of communication and demonstration of reconciliation. Why?

So that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:12-13, niv)

That means if you want to grow in your Christian faith, it will come by helping reconcile people to God and each other.

You and I are God's method of reconciling the world to God. So as we prepare for this important time in this church body, let me ask you. How well are you telling West Valley about God's love? How well do they see it in the way we treat each other?

Lee Strobel, author and speaker tells this story to show how important it is to give a clear message. It's only been within the last few years that translation programs like Google

Translations have become very accurate. Until recently, you could put in a phrase, translate it into another language, and then translate it back and it wouldn't be anything like the original. So you'd start with English, translate to say German or Spanish, and then back to English. Lee Strobel wrote:

"So I tried something fun. I took the song 'Take Me Out to the Ballgame,' typed it into the computer, and translated it into German. Then I translated it back into English to see if anything got lost in the translation. You know the song: 'Take me out to the ballgame. Take me out to the crowd. Buy me some peanuts and Crackerjack. I don't care if I ever get back. Let me root, root, root for the home team. If they don't win, it's a shame. For it's one, two, three strikes you're out at the old ballgame.'" Stroebel writes, "I translated it into German and then back into English. Well, something got lost in the translation. It sounds a little militant, like Arnold Schwarzenegger.

'Execute me to the ball play. Execute me with the masses. Buy me certain groundnuts and crackerstackfusig. I'm not interested if I never receive back. Let me root, root, root for the main team. If they do not win, it is dishonor. For there are one, two, three impacts on you at the old ball play.'"

Something got lost in the translation! The same is true about Jesus. Something through the centuries gets lost a bit. I don't mean the translation of the New Testament text; I'm talking about the way people see how the church translates Jesus. Something in the way church is done has garbled this simple, life-altering message of God's love that gives us power, riches, purpose, and reconciliation. By the way, that's especially true when the church pursues political power and influence over Kingdom power and influence. The only way others can see Jesus is a clear message in you and me as they watch and listen to you and us. They may read about it in the Bible, but they'll look at us to see if it works.

We have His power, His riches, His purpose, because we've been reconciled to Him. So we have a message of reconciliation to share and show.

We're going to pray. You might need to confess your need to control, submit to God's power. Become a servant.

You might need to confess your desire for riches; accept the riches of Christ which are more than money. Become generous.

You might need to confess your lesser purpose (work, sports, fame) and submit to his purpose. Become a reconciler for Christ.

Benediction:

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.
(Ephesians 3:20, 21)