

## Ephesians Devotionals

### Read Ephesians 1

**He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will Ephesians 1:5**

Freshman year of college seemed like a great opportunity to try new things. Making friends was often a challenge for me in high school, but I realized most of us at college were in the same boat: frightened little fish in a great big pond. As I entered my 8am English class, I resolved to talk to everyone and attempt to make connections. Among that small class of 15, some had no interest in talking to me (they must have heard about me already). Several became acquaintances afterwards, giving a head nod as we walked through the commons or had other classes together. Two people in there though became actual friends that I called and met up with around campus. While I walked in determined to be a friend to everyone, it was a small minority that was up for that.

This word predestined is a tricky one, and I'll be honest as to my position. The word means to "define or determine beforehand." Some take this to mean that as God was firing things up in Genesis 1:1, He was determining that only some people He created would be saved and adopted. I disagree with that view. Instead I see him defining beforehand that anyone who would bend to His will in Christ can be saved and adopted. It goes back to my English class, if you'll allow the comparison for a moment. I was open to befriend everyone. Some flat rejected (the lost). Others were fine to be friendly (those who are indifferent to God, friendly at times, forgetful at others). The minority were willing to be true friends (like the minority that takes the narrow path to God). **Theological issues on how God saves are not just for pastors and teachers. All of us should be willing to consider, but regardless of where you stand, are you encouraging people to the narrow path? If you believe God has already determined the exact people He's going to save, you don't know who they are, so be willing to share the gospel. If you believe God has defined the path of salvation and that anyone can take it, you too must be willing to share the gospel. Salvation and adoption by God are tremendous gifts and too good not to share.**

### Read Ephesians 2

**For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8-9**

One of my favorite childhood gifts still strikes me because I can recall at the time how extravagant it seemed. I was in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade when my parents bought me a G.I. Joe Nighthawk, a very large toy plane that even had its own small secondary plane with it! (I'm missing it a bit just typing about it.) I always thought it was the coolest thing, but had never asked for it. In the 80's, a toy that was pushing almost \$100 was ridiculous, but I must have eyed it at some point. I can still recall repeatedly thanking my parents long after Christmas was over. Despite being only 8 years-old, I was very aware of the valuable gift I had been given.

When we think of our favorite gifts, they often have a couple of qualities: they were highly thoughtful, very expensive, or perhaps both. When I read today's passage, I see the grace of God as a similar gift. It is thoughtfully given to people who desperately need it, and it came at the great expense of Jesus' death on the cross. This gift is what allows me to recall the great forgiveness I've been given. Sometimes grace causes us to think about how terrible and undeserving we are, but I am learning to see it in a new way. God didn't give it because I deserved it or because I would EVER DESERVE IT! My Christian life produces some wonderful fruit from time to time, but my fruit still has a tendency to rot over time through my selfish heart. So whether in my best times with God or my worst, I'm still covered by the grace of God. **How do you view the gift of God's grace? If you believe it was freely given, do you realize it remains freely given? Certainly, God expects us to pursue Him in holiness, but He knows we'll never do it perfectly and will always need His great gift. Where do you feel you're falling short in your Christian walk right now? Talk to God specifically about it, remembering His grace already has it covered. Where do you feel you're walking well with Jesus right now? Keep it under grace, realizing that your good works provide no redemption and are likely to rot under the influence of our sinful attitudes at any time.**

### **Read Ephesians 3**

**So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith-that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend...and to know the love of Christ...Ephesians 3:17-19**

Pulling weeds seemed really easy at first. As a young kid, I was grabbing them left and right before my grandmother stopped me. "You've got to grab them by the root," she said. That small instruction suddenly turned weed-pulling into a real chore! A few of the smaller weeds would come up ok, but the bigger ones had incredibly tough roots that seemed bigger than the plant itself! I knew roots existed, but seeing the way they spread and anchored a plant to the ground was a real revelation.

We aren't called to love others like Jesus did. We are called to love Jesus, and in turn we become more aware of what love really is. Jesus said the greatest commandments are to love God completely and others as ourselves. There is priority indicated in this statement. We cannot love people first and God second, because our love has no root or real depth. We're simply working off what we've seen, not what we've known. Ephesians 2 reminded us that we are saved by our belief in God's work. Today we see allowing Christ to truly dwell in us roots us more deeply in his character and love so that we can know and operate in the love of Christ. **Are you finding it challenging to love someone? Maybe it's a co-worker, church member, or classmate. Perhaps it's someone closer like a family member or close friend who seems to often be a source of disappointment. Don't attempt to love them like Jesus, but instead focus more on loving Jesus. As you do, you'll experience the unconditional love He shows you on your worst days and as a result you will be more rooted in His love and strengthened to love others because you see how you are loved. Lift up that difficult name to the Lord today. Ask God to reveal and remind you of the depth of His love so that you are empowered to love**

others in the same way. It's not about really trying to love better...it's about being rooted in the better love of Jesus.

#### **Read Ephesians 4**

**I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called Ephesians 4:1**

The military code of conduct are six simple points that we received early in basic training. They were small and imprinted on a card that we kept in our wallet. They cover issues such as how to conduct yourself as a P.O.W., how to carry yourself as a soldier, and who you represent. While it's a personal code of conduct, like most aspects of military life, it places an emphasis on the larger whole of the entire armed forces. Soldiers are reconstructed to operate as a complimentary and effective piece of the whole. Movies highlight the one-man army...reality does not.

Ephesians 4 likely had several statements that jumped out at you. There are conversations about refraining from past behavior, finding your current calling, as well as forgiving as Christ forgives (v.32). However, the entire chapter is a call back to the first verse, to walk in a worthy manner. Not worthy to get to Heaven, because that's impossible and only done through faith in Christ. Instead we live a worthy service that honors Jesus. We live a worthy unity that allows the church to stand out in a conflicted and fragmented world. Did you think it was a great gospel tract or sermon that creates change? There is no greater testimony for the gospel amongst the lost than for Christians to live like Christ. **How powerful is your testimony in the world? Do you have forgiveness struggles that hinder people from wanting whatever it is you have? Do you use words of affirmation that draw people to you? How do people view you in the church? Are you a loner, or one who operates for the greater good of the local church? Examine where you're walking well; we're so quick to dismiss our victories. But take the time to examine where you could be walking better. That change could really catch someone's attention and change another life that's been watching for someone to show them what the Christian walk can really look like.**

#### **Read Ephesians 5**

**And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 5:18**

The Ephesians had a real problem with alcohol. A celebration of the false god Bacchus included people drinking until they lost control and began running wild in the streets. For some, the loss of control that alcohol brought led them to believe they were super-powered, running into walls while barely feeling the pain (at least until the next day). This oft-quoted verse is less about the first part about getting drunk. It's a bigger warning about allowing anything or anyone to have more control over your life than the Holy Spirit of God.

We're called to "be filled with the Holy Spirit." When you accept Jesus Christ, it is at that time that the Holy Spirit comes into your life. So if the Holy Spirit is already within me, what does it

mean to be filled? Literally the Greek phrase means, “be being filled.” It means we are allowing the Holy Spirit to move in complete freedom in our lives. He is God, and yet we can quench (1 Thess 5:19) and resist (Acts 7:51) His power due to our own choices to be filled with wine, relationship, or some other passion that begins to exert overwhelming control on our time and decisions. **How can you be filled with the Holy Spirit? It’s all about submission. Submit to the Word of God by reading it regularly to create greater awareness of who God is. Submit to God in prayer, seeking His wisdom and leading on your life. Ask the Holy Spirit to keep you aware throughout your day, and not just in the moments you anticipate to be the spiritually important moments. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is a daily submission to allow God to have the greatest influence over your thoughts, words, and actions. Today examine if there is anything or anyone who has a louder voice or greater power over you than Him.**

### **Read Ephesians 6**

**For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places. Ephesians 6:12**

Teaching history to high school students has caused me to make a connection regarding many of the conflicts over the history of our country. While the battle on the ground is often the focus, the secondary battle is just as important...the P.R. battle. General Lee’s attempt to take Gettysburg during the Civil War; the Japanese resolve on Iwo Jima; the TET offensive of the North Vietnamese. Each of these moments came from desperate military forces who foresaw a military defeat and attempted to weaken the resolve of civilians back home. Of the 3, only N. Vietnam successfully pulled it off.

In each of these examples, there was a battle going on behind the battle. The same exists for us as believers today. Social media has made it especially easy for Christians to attack those who’s attitudes and actions stand in opposition to Scripture. I would argue this is a worthless endeavor. Every current enemy of God can be converted into friend and family through a radical moment of salvation. Yet, if that person is saved, the same conflicts will continue because we’re not fighting people...we’re fighting against spiritual forces of evil. **Do you allow discussions to become personal arguments with lost people? People are not argued or yelled into the kingdom of God, and it’s important that we realize lost people will often advocate for attitudes of spiritual darkness (abortion, euthanasia, etc.) Are there any conflicts you’re currently involved in without recognizing the proper enemy? Be a person of prayer that your words may be gracious, true, and not a hindrance to an unbeliever accepting the gospel.**