

Leader Notes

Text: Ephesians 3.14-21

Power

Context and Background

Background: The letter of Ephesians was written by the Apostle Paul and was more than likely intended to be used as a circular letter for the churches in Asia Minor. Paul's richest and longest ministry was among the people of Ephesus (See Acts 19). During this time, Paul's ministry spread to influence the entirety of Asia Minor through missionaries trained/discipled by Paul. Epaphras, the founder of the church in Colossae, is one such example. It seems that sometime after Paul's departure from Ephesus, that he felt the need to express in written form the content of his message while at Ephesus. This underlying desire affects the tone of Ephesians, making it more general and encompassing in its scope than other letters of Paul which deal with specific theological issues and church dilemmas. Thus, the letter of Ephesians is perhaps the most complete record of Paul's thoughts about the gospel. In reading Ephesians, one discovers that Paul understood the gospel to rest upon the gracious, redemptive movement of God. This movement was rooted in God's character of love. Further, this gracious movement was to work out into the daily lives of people of faith in unity and love for others.

Context: The present text is the second prayer of Paul for his readers found in the letter. This prayer continues the thought from Ephesians 2.19-22, the thought that in Jesus, people from all walks of life are brought into unity. From this thought, Paul desires to bridge to the practical implications of how this unity looks in everyday life (See Ephesians 4.1-16). To bridge from the spiritual reality of unity to the practical implications, Paul offers this prayer, one focused on God's indwelling love as the means of living as a unified people of God.

The Text:

An Indwelling God (Ephesians 3.14-17): In the text, Paul is moving from the spiritual reality of the unity of God's people (Ephesians 2.11-22) and the reasons why such unity is both amazing and difficult (Ephesians 3.1-13) to the practical implications of this spiritual unity for everyday life (Ephesians 4-6). Paul understands that living in light of God's redemptive work is difficult if not impossible if lived on one's own strength. Therefore, he offers a prayer on behalf of the believers. This prayer begins by addressing God the Father as the source of all life. Paul asks that God the Father would strengthen the inner being of the believers with His Holy Spirit. It is interesting to note that in Paul's mind preparation for living a unified life begins with inner transformation. This transformation of the deepest part of a person is nothing less than the work of God. The specific work of transformation that Paul envisions is the very indwelling of Christ himself. Quite simply, Paul asks that God would work by His Spirit in the deepest part of a person's life so that Jesus might physically dwell there. The idea of dwelling is less the idea of being present than it is being present and having control. That is, Paul is asking for God to work so that Jesus is not only in a believer but that he has control of who a believer is at the core of their being.

An Outworking Love (Ephesians 3.18-19): The result of Jesus' presence, a presence which has possession of a person's will, is the outworking of love for others. This love, a love which comes because of the indwelling presence of Christ, forms the foundation of one's life. In the experience and expression of this love for and with God's people, one finds an understanding of God's love. In Paul's mind, it was in the grasping of the extent and scope of God's love that one found and was filled with God himself. That is, one came to a place of an intimate relationship with God. Paul next breaks into a benediction, but it is this thought, the thought about God's love that carries forward into Ephesians 4. The grasping of God's love is that which provides one with the power they need to live in a unified life with other believers. The logic of Paul's prayer goes something like this: (1) God's Spirit does a work in the depths of who we are so that (2) Jesus might be physically present in us which results in (3) a life that is founded upon love. This life of love enables us to (4) understand God's own great love. In the understanding of God's love we (5) make room for God in our lives, or perhaps we actually realize that God is working in us in all that He is as Father, Son, and Spirit. In recognizing and living in light of the fullness of God in us we (6) find ourselves empowered to live as God intends that His people live.

Application: How do we live the life God intends for us? We often find the task difficult if not impossible on our own strength. However, we were never intended to live as God's people, to live for God on our own. God intends that we live for Him, as His people by the strength He provides. This strength comes as we make room for God in our lives, as we open our hearts to Him so that He might work in the deepest recesses of our soul, clearing out areas so that Jesus may have full possession of us. As Jesus possesses us in a deeper way our lives exude love, a love that shows us God's own love. We are changed. It all begins as we open our lives to make room for God, something that begins with prayer.

Prayer: Brings God into Life

Discussion Guide 3

Ephesians 3.14-21

Note to leaders:

This guide is a little different than what you are used to experiencing. Since we are in a series that focuses on prayer, this guide is designed to build upon the sermon by leading groups to slow down and just be intimate with God in prayer. Encourage your group before you start by acknowledging that this study is different, a study that is a practical application. Consider reading the paragraph below out loud as a way of preparing people's hearts. Be sure to debrief afterward to see how people are feeling and what they learned.

Setting the Stage: *Some days living the life God is calling us to live is difficult. No, maybe we should say most days, and it is not just difficult, it is impossible. We know we should be more loving, more giving, more caring, we just aren't. We just don't seem to have the energy for it much less the appetite. Perhaps we should. Honestly, we just don't. No matter how hard we struggle, the energy meter, the level of desire, the hunger and thirst for the things of God are low if not absent. In these moments what are we to do? Give up? Try harder? Get pumped? We can try these, but the effects are short-lived. What about slowing down and making room for God, opening up space in the deepest parts of who we are so that He might do a work, a work in us that lead to an experience of God in new and exciting ways? What if we made room for God, made room for Him, a permanent room so that He might live in us and possess us in an ever-growing manner? What if we made room for God, made room for Him and all of His fullness so that all that He is as Father, Son, and Spirit flowed into us and out of us? Could we then perhaps find ourselves empowered, emboldened, enthralled and enraptured by a love so magnificent and grand that it spilled forth from our lives in ways that were unmistakably nothing short of the life God is calling us to live? What if we made room for God?*

- As the leader, instruct your group to close their eyes and put themselves in the presence of God. Have them imagine that God is present with them. Give them a few minutes to tell God honestly how they are feeling, where they are emotionally and spiritually at the moment. After speaking and acknowledging where they are, encourage your members to still themselves to hear from God.
- Ask your group members to think for a moment about their lives. What are some areas of their life in which they long for transformation, areas in which they might be struggling to live as God has called them to live? Give them a few moments to think and then ask that they write these areas down on a 3x5 card.
- Instruct the members of your group to imagine that their heart has a door that grants access, a door which only opens from the inside. Invite them to open the door of their hearts, the door to the deepest part of who they are for the purpose of inviting God inside.
- Read Ephesians 3.14-21 out loud, slowly allowing the words to resonate and settle in the hearts of your group. Have them linger on words or phrases that catch their attention. This takes several minutes. Have them view this as a word of God to them. (Allow for group members to share the word or phrase that came to them.)
- Read Ephesians 3.14-21 again in the same way as before. Have your group listen to where their word or phrase connects to their life right now. Specifically, in what ways do the words or phrases address the areas they wrote on the 3x5 card? Invite the group to sit with these words and phrases for a few minutes. What might God be saying? Invite group members to record these thoughts on their 3x5 card. (Allow for group members to share.)
- Read Ephesians 3.14-21 once more, having group members listen attentively. In what ways is God speaking through His Word, inviting them to respond? Allow several minutes for a prayer of response. Encourage members not to censure their thoughts or requests, but let them flow spontaneously and freely before a loving God. (Allow the group to share their responses with one another.)
- Read Ephesians 3.14-21 once more. Have your group members rest in God's presence and love. Allow time for group members to rest and wait before reentering life as usual. What words, phrases, or thoughts do they wish to take with them as they move out of this time? Invite members to write these words on their cards as a reminder. (Allow time for members to share these with one another.)