

Message Discussion Guide

LIFEBLOOD, THE GOSPEL: WHAT WE BELIEVE

The Church at Brook Hills . Rev. Deric Thomas . April 6, 2008 Ephesians 1:3-14

This guide is to help you facilitate discussion with your Small Group. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering and owning the truths of God's Word. There may be questions you do not want to use and there may be instances where you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on their relationship with God. Your role is to facilitate this experience not to complete the discussion guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid teaching task list.

Connect...

Option 1

Write on the board or read the following statement: *"I am what I am. I cannot change. It's just my personality. I've always been this way and I always will. I'm hopeless."*

This kind of reasoning is sadly common in the church today. It's difficult for people to believe in the power of the cross when they can't see the results of regeneration in their own lives.

Discuss whether this is a true statement or a false statement for Christ-followers to say. You might get into a discussion about whether experience or God's Word is the source of truth.

Today we're going to see how this type of attitude aligns with the truths of the Scriptures being studied in today's teaching.

Option 2

The Elevator Speech

Have your group share what's the first thing you say when someone asks you to tell something about yourself? Do you discuss your hometown? your profession? your school? your family? your hobbies or interests? Anything else would just be weird, right?

Ask your group to practice sharing with each other—in just a couple minutes—how their identity is a Christ-follower and how Jesus has transformed them personally.

Let them know, today we are going to review seven truths about our identity as Christ-followers.

Review the Message...

Begin by discussing the following truth, which is overarching throughout the message. Have them share what this truth means to them.

Message Truth: Through the gospel, true followers of Jesus Christ have been fully united with Him personally and with God's global church corporately.

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Christ-followers are united with Christ and identified with him on two levels—the personal level and the global level. Most of the aspects of today’s message relate to the personal level.

A word about the corporate level...

What does it mean to say that Christ-followers are united with Christ and *with God’s global church corporately*?

In the language of the New Testament, the word for church, *ecclesia*, appears 114 times in the New Testament. Ninety-two of those cases refer to the local church while the remaining instances refer to the universal church. This sheds light on the importance of local bodies of believers—which make up the global church!

Check out these examples: Matthew 16:18 (global), 1 Corinthians 15:9 (local and global), Ephesians 5:25 (global), Romans 16:16 (local), 1 Corinthians 1:2 (local), 2 Thessalonians 1:1,4 (local and global)

We’ve talked a lot lately about what it means to *be* the church. Again, the Greek word *ecclesia* provides deeper understanding. Its meaning indicates that the church is about people, a web of relationships, a group of people who come together as God’s people, who are called out to serve God. There is a vertical dimension to the name church. This assembly exists not for itself, but for God’s purposes...to bring glory to him!

Now, just as the global church is made up of local churches, so the local church is made up of individual Christ-followers. Today, we’re focusing on what it means to be fully united with Christ on a personal level.

Read Ephesians 1:3-14 as a group.

- Remember how Deric pointed out almost ten times in the passage where the phrase “in Christ” (or the like) appears.
- What does this phrase mean in terms of why and how we have spiritual blessings?

Praise God that He has...

Made Us Rich in Christ (vs. 3)

Our wealth is in Christ.

We have every spiritual blessing there is!

Deric mentioned Jesus’ statement in Matthew 5:3, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.”

- Ask your group what it means to be poor in spirit.
- How does that statement line up with Ephesians 1:3 where it says we have been blessed in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ?

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Think back to the couple he mentioned who lived all those years on the oil-rich land in Oklahoma without knowing it.

- How do you think their lives would have been different if they knew all along they were millionaires?
- What about us? We have been told that we're given every spiritual blessing in Christ. Should knowing that fact, change the way we live our lives?
- Do we pray with that kind of gratitude and confidence?

William Carey, one of the first Baptist missionaries, also known as the "father of modern missions" said, "Attempt great things for God. Expect great things from God."

- How should the truths of Ephesians 1:3 affect our understanding of Carey's statement?

Chosen Us In Christ (vs. 4a)

We were chosen before the creation of the world.

We are holy and blameless positionally, and we should be progressively.

Ephesians 1:4 tells us that we were chosen before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless.

- Does this truth cause you great joy or great concern?
- How do you think the Jewish Christians felt when they realized that the Gentiles were also chosen before the foundation of the world?
- Why do you think some people focus on trying to figure out who is chosen and who is not chosen, instead of seeking to understand what it means to be chosen?

Deric mentioned that Deuteronomy 29:29 says some things are meant to be a secret to God and are too difficult for us to understand. He specifically was referring to God's Sovereignty in Election (choosing us) and Man's Responsibility in salvation- repentance and faith in Christ.

- Discuss why you think men have debated and sought to try to explain these co-existing truths throughout the ages.
- Do you think if God wanted us to totally understand these concepts that it would be clearly explained in His Word?
- Why then do you think God chose not to explain how these two concepts co-exist?

Deric pointed out that while God has declared us holy in our position before Him, we still must grow in holiness progressively as Christ-followers. The Holy Spirit in us will always work to produce a holy life.

- How can we cooperate with the Holy Spirit to live a holy and blameless life?
- How does the concept of feeding the flesh vs. feeding the spirit fit in here?

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Predestined us In Love Through Christ (vs. 4b-6)

We were predestined to be adopted.

Since the Father loves the Son He also loves us!

Deric reminded us that the word *predestined* is not a bad word; it's a Biblical word. Paul said we were *predestined to be adopted*.

- Why do you think God chose to use the words *predestined* and *adopted* to explain our relationship to Him in Christ?
- What's different from an adopted child and a child born naturally?
- Why did we need to be adopted if God created us?

Redeemed Us In Christ (vs. 7-8)

We have been redeemed by the blood of Christ!

We have been forgiven through the blood of Christ!

Think about the way you feel when you creep over the speed limit driving down 280. Now think about the way you feel when you've deeply wronged a family member.

- Does the size of our sin in our eyes or the affect of our sin on the person we have sinned against affect our need for forgiveness?
- Does it affect our gratitude for our forgiveness? Should it?

We have been forgiven not just for breaking God's law, but for rebelling against the person and character of God. When we understand that even a small sin is rebellion against God, it should have a direct connection to our response to his forgiveness.

Deric told the story of he and his wife walking on the beach, looking back to see their footprints had disappeared because the waves were constantly washing them away. He pointed out that this is a picture of God's forgiveness. He washes away the sins of the past, the sins of the present, and has already washed away the sins of the future.

- What keeps us from believing and accepting this truth?
- How should understanding this cause us to live?

Ask your group members if they are still seeing footprints...or if they can celebrate the freedom of forgiveness. It doesn't matter the size of the sin...remember Deric's size 12 footprints and Heather's size 6 footprints were washed away just the same.

Revealed To Us His Will In Christ (vs. 9-10)

Jesus Christ is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

Christ will rule over a united people forever!

What is the mystery of God's will mentioned in Eph. 1:9?

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Colossians 2:2 also speaks of this mystery. Why does Paul say he wants them to understand this mystery? *He desires encouragement and unity in the church.*

- How should focusing on the mystery of God's Will bring encouragement and unity to the Body of Christ?
- If we understand that God's ultimate goal is for Him to bring unity in His Body under His Rule and authority forever, why do you think we don't seek to see that happen now?
- What keeps it from happening?
- What can we do to change that?

Given Us an Inheritance In Christ (vs. 11-12)

God works all things according to the counsel of His will.

We have great hope in Christ!

- Ask your group what our hope is in Christ.
- How does knowing that God is working all things out to the conformity of His Will affect your view of life? of your problems? of your current circumstances?
- Why is living for the praise of His glory (as mentioned in verse 12) a worthy end?
- What does that look like?

Sealed Us In Christ (vs. 13-14)

We are sealed by the Holy Spirit.

Our possession of the Holy Spirit guarantees our inheritance, our unity and our growth in holiness.

- How does knowing that you are sealed by the Holy Spirit at salvation affect your view of your salvation?
- How does knowing that God has sealed you with His Spirit and given you His Spirit within you as a Helper to enable you to live a holy life, relate to the fact that we've received every spiritual blessing in Christ?
- How should this truth affect your praise of God?
- How should this truth affect the way you live for God's Glory this week?

We know that the only person who can produce the character of Christ in us is the Spirit of God himself. Challenge your group this week to seek to daily ask for the Spirit's help in transforming their character into the character of Christ and finding their identity in Christ.

Praise God that all of this is.....

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By grace alone!

Through faith alone!

In Christ alone!

For God's glory alone!

Praise God that our true identity is.....

In Christ!

Spend time praying and thanking God for his Spirit who lives in us and asking him to continue transforming our lives into the image of Jesus Christ.