

DONALD J. WILLS  
SENIOR PASTOR

FEBRUARY  
2019

# COMMUNITY

IT'S TIME



ADULT CONNECT  
CLASS CURRICULUM



The purpose of First Baptist Church of Fort Worth is to **introduce** people into a loving relationship with Jesus, **instruct** them in spiritual growth through God's Word, **inspire** them to serve for God's kingdom, and **incorporate** them in authentic worship to glorify God.

## A Note From Our Pastor

Dear FBC family and friends,

The purpose throughout this study is to build up the FBCFW Community as followers of Christ to strengthen each of you in your daily walk to be bold in your faith, and to enable you to share the good news and invite others into our community. Our community is centered around and built upon the Savior, Jesus Christ. He is the centrality of who we are and what we do. Community by traditional definition relates to a group of people living in the same place, but our community is more than geographical location. A more current view of the word community is a group of people with the same interests, beliefs, and goals that share a sense of belonging. The latter is a more accurate picture of our community. We belong together with our common bond of Jesus as Savior and Lord. Let us be of the same mind and invite others into this place: *"A Place to Belong."*

As a reminder, the layout of this Curriculum begins with a 7-day approach for both the teacher and the members to get the most from each study. We also acknowledge that teachers may have their own methods for preparing the lessons and we encourage them to prepare in the way that makes them most effective in presenting God's Word and the weekly lesson. We also encourage each teacher and member to use the suggested 7-day approach for their own personal study and encouragement.

As we continue our study in Ephesians which gives us a comprehensive picture of the community which God has called us to be, let us grow and serve as members of God's community here at FBCFW. Remember that Christ shed His blood for us to have the right to be members of His body and receive an inheritance beyond compare. Therefore, let us faithfully dedicate ourselves to studying God's Word throughout this year as a community, pursuing a relationship with Christ and others in the community to encourage one another and to keep us accountable, sharing the gospel with everyone whom we meet on a daily basis, and worshiping our Savior corporately as a people whom He has graciously called. To God be the glory!

-Blessings  
Pastor Don





## *Suggested Plan for Using this Bible Study Guide Effectively*

### *Introduce*

**Day 1:** Read and meditate on the Scripture, asking God to guide you throughout the week as you study His Word and allowing Him to speak to you through the Spirit. Read the **INTRODUCE** portion of the lesson commentary.

### *Instruct*

**Day 2:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and read the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary. Concentrate on memorizing the focal verse for that particular week.

**Day 3:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and answer the focal questions in the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary.

### *Inspire*

**Day 4:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and begin thinking about tangible ways you can incorporate the principles you learned in your daily life. Read the **INSPIRE** portion of the lesson commentary.

### *Incorporate*

**Day 5:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and apply the theological principle that you learned from this week in a tangible way. Use the **INCORPORATE** portion of the lesson commentary to guide you.

**Day 6:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and in the journal section describe how God allowed you to apply this passage in a real and tangible way this week.

**Day 7:** Review the Scripture and share with others in your Connect Class on Sunday morning at 9:30am. Be ready to share your experience about how God allowed you to apply the lesson for that week.

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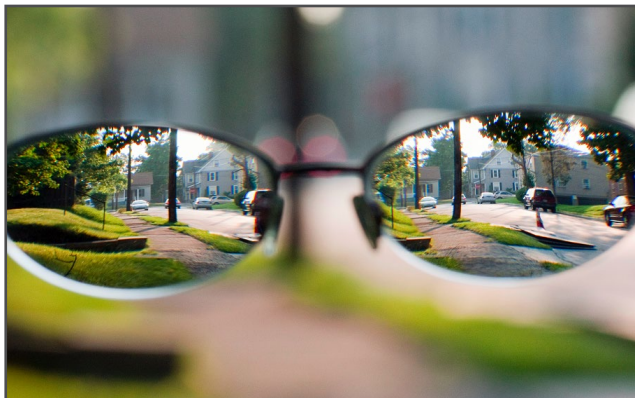


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*February 3, 2019*



# *The Fellowship in the Community*

## *Ephesians 2:11-18*

Focal Verse:

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

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Ephesians 2:13

## Introduce

For those of us who have visited a foreign country on a business trip, mission trip, or vacation, we know what it feels like to be a stranger in a foreign land. As US citizens, whenever we travel abroad to foreign countries, we must have a valid passport, the right visas, and meet all their requirements to enter their land as a guest. In addition, we must follow their laws lest we face their penalties as well. Although we may have access to their country and may even have the privilege to live and work there as a permanent resident, we still do not have all the rights and privileges of a citizen! No matter how at ease we may feel or how much the country may feel like home to us, we're still a guest. We may learn their customs, speak their language, and pay their taxes, but we aren't citizens—we're still a foreigner or stranger.

When arriving at any port of entry to a foreign country, including here in the US, the distinction becomes even more palpable because immigration has lines for both citizens of that particular country and non-citizens. As we proceed through the line for US citizens in the airport, it always rings joyously in our ears as we interact with the immigration official as he or she stamps our passports and then declares, "Welcome home!" Yet, when we enter a foreign country, we don't receive that same declaration; rather, they welcome us to Brazil, Kenya, or whatever country we are entering. They may express genuine happiness and excitement at our arrival, but we're not home. No matter how many times we have visited a country, we still feel a sense of disconnect and distance because it's not our home.



This distance and distinction become even more evident because countries can deny our entry for any reason. Recently, a seventy-year-old American couple set sail on a cruise in the Far East to Japan, South Korea, and China. The cruise began without a hitch, but it soon turned into a nightmare when the Chinese government contacted the cruise ship to inform them that this couple didn't have the proper paperwork to enter the country. The cruise line tried to work with the Chinese to find a solution, but to no avail. The government wouldn't even let the ship dock at the port while the couple

## Introduce

remained onboard without disembarking. Consequently, the American couple was forced to leave the ship in South Korea and find their own way back to the US at nearly \$2,400 in additional costs. Neither the couple or the cruise line could do anything, except submit to the authority of the government and abide by its mandates. Unlike the boundaries and lawful requirements of countries to distinguish between citizens and non-citizens, God has broken down the barrier of sin to call a new people unto Himself. Although we may come from different backgrounds and cultures, we can become one people in Christ. In [Ephesians 2:11-18](#), Paul describes how the Gentiles, who were formerly strangers to the covenants made with the Jewish people, were brought near and included through the blood of Christ. Regardless of how different we may seem according to human perspectives, in Christ we all have become united as fellow citizens and recipients of God's promises as members of His household. Through Christ, therefore, we have the ability to fellowship in a diverse community which shares one thing in common: we have been saved by grace through faith in Christ and have a relationship with Him.

Key  
Question

What does genuine fellowship in Christ look like?

## In Reference



Lauren McMaha, "Embarrassed Couple Kicked off Cruise Ship for Booking Error: 'We Couldn't Believe It,'" available at [www.foxnews.com](http://www.foxnews.com) (November 30, 2018).



### Ephesians 2:11-13

#### **FELLOWSHIP THROUGH THE BLOOD:**

In his only command in the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul urges **Gentiles** to **remember** the life they **once** lived in order to emphasize the fellowship they now have with Jews in the church through Christ. Paul has already demonstrated how both Gentile and Jew were **once** “dead in trespasses and sins,” but through the gracious love and mercy of Christ both groups have been “made alive” ([Eph 2:1-9](#)). Now, he explains how both **Gentiles** and Jews have become united as “one new man” in one body through the work that Christ performed on the cross. Consequently, he stresses that no competition should exist in the church because no one group or person is better than another; we all have the same rights and privileges through Christ who has saved us “by grace through faith” despite our sinful disobedience.

Why should we avoid cliques or having groups which exclude others in the church?

Question  
# 1

Paul opens this section by highlighting the perceived physical differences between those identified as **uncircumcision** by those who refer to themselves as the

**circumcision** (v. 11). When he speaks about **Gentiles in the flesh**, he is drawing attention to their physical or ethnic heritage as viewed by Jews in general rather than their sin nature. By drawing this distinction, Paul emphasizes that salvation does not depend upon our physical heritage expressed through rituals as some Jews had come to believe. One

**For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.**

**Romans 2:28-29**

is neither included or excluded in salvation based upon their heritage alone. Rather, salvation and membership in God’s community as His people depends solely upon a relationship with Christ and what He has done according to His grace and mercy. At this time, some of the Jews wrongly believed that their designation as the people of

## Instruct

God centered upon their physical heritage and their adherence to ritual—in particular **circumcision**. In fact, some attempted to force Gentile Christians wrongly to follow Jewish ritual in order to have salvation. Using **circumcision** as a means to distinguish themselves from Gentiles, some Jews created an artificial barrier to exclude others from finding eternal life in the Lord. However, God never intended **circumcision** as a means to exclude or prevent people from having eternal life based on their physical heritage, but rather He instituted it as a reminder to those who had a relationship with Him of His promise and covenant with them. Although **circumcision** did distinguish those people who had a relationship with the Lord from those who did not, the circumcised (i.e. the Jews) were to live exemplary lives which displayed their transformation by God so that they might point others to Him and encourage them to begin a relationship with Him.

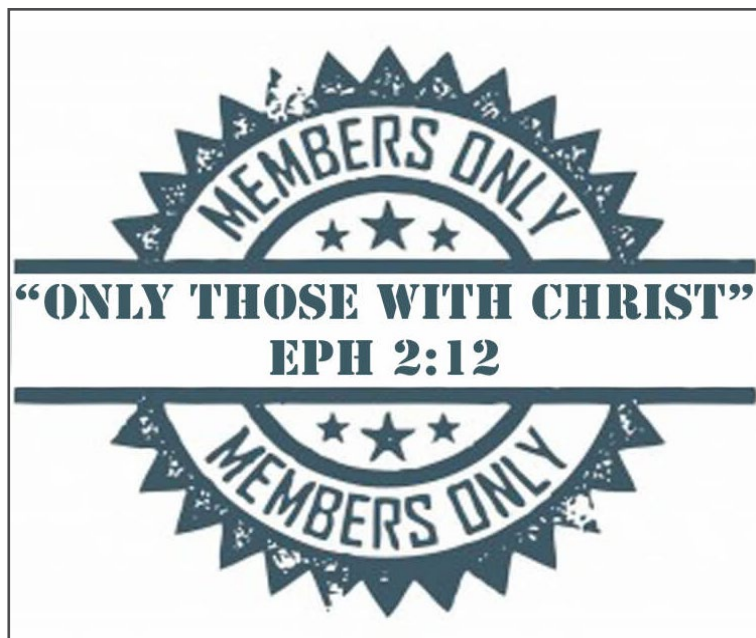
In what ways do some Christians develop this same attitude of exclusivism? How can we overcome this attitude when we see it occurring?

Question  
# 2

Moreover, the problem with relying on ritual is that it depends solely upon what mankind can do for himself rather than what God has done for him. For this reason, Paul emphasizes that the act of **circumcision** occurs **in the flesh by hands**. In other words, it merely reflects an outwardly physical act rather than an inward spiritual transformation accompanied by the renewal of the heart and mind. Unless accompanied with life-change in Christ, however, **circumcision** has no value and those who perform it mutilate the flesh for no good reason ([Phil 3:2-3](#)). Although rituals like **circumcision** and baptism can help remind us of the promises of God, they cannot save us; only a relationship with Jesus has the power to cancel sin and bestow life. From our relationship with Christ then springs traditions which remind us the price that He paid on our behalf and the promise He made to all who accept His gift and surrender to Him.



Next, Paul describes four ways the Gentiles differ from God's people (**Israel**). When Paul refers to **Israel** here in this context, he uses it synonymously with God's people—that is the ones who have a relationship with the Lord through the Messiah. From Paul's other writings, we know that salvation does not depend upon one's physical heritage, but rather one's relationship to Jesus (Rom 9:6); therefore, some Jews did not have **hope** and were excluded from eternal life because they rejected the Messiah. So, when Paul refers to **Israel**, he is addressing those who have a true relationship with the Lord rather than physical **Israel** in general who may outwardly claim to be a Jew but inwardly have rejected the covenant and promise of God. For this reason, the fact that **at that time** the Gentiles **were without Christ** distinguishes them from the people of God.



The same principle holds true in our community today. Some people may have been baptized and consider themselves members of the church, but they don't have **Christ**. They have relied on ritual, heritage, or even "membership" in the church for salvation, but in the end they will find themselves excluded from the promise of God because they have no relationship with His Son. Although membership to God's household as His people is exclusive in the sense that there is only one way to obtain it, it is open to all who accept His Son as their Savior and repent of their sin! Don't be deceived by the alluring promises of sin or the lies of the enemy who leads us to believe that we can overcome these things on our own and achieve eternal life; instead, turn to Jesus as the one and only source who can save us and make us members of God's own household. As a result of being **without Christ**, the Gentiles also found themselves as **aliens from the commonwealth of Israel** and **strangers from the covenants of promise**. Apart from Christ, people only have the inheritance of sin and death to which they can look forward because they have forfeited the **promise** of life. In Christ, however, we have all the rights and privileges of God's children! As we learned in the first chapter, God called to Himself a people as His inheritance who responded in faith which permitted the Lord to work through them to accomplish His plan. According to His grace and mercy, God established **covenants** with these imperfect men which promised life. Whether



## Instruct

Noah, Abraham, David, or the “new covenant” prophesied through Jeremiah ([31:31-34](#)), God’s covenants with these men bid people to find comfort, refuge, strength, and most of all life and blessing in Him as His people. In fact, [Jeremiah 31:33](#) explicitly states, “But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

What promises or covenants did God make in the Old Testament? How do they apply to us today?

Question  
# 3

The last two differences between Gentiles and the people of God present a bleak picture of their existence. They have **no hope** and are **without God in the world**. With stark realism, Paul lays the facts bare: the Gentiles are hopeless without a relationship with Christ. They stand alone **in the world without God**; they have no one to whom they can turn in times of distress and despair. The word **without God** in the Greek is the one from which we get our word atheist. In this case, it doesn’t mean that they didn’t believe in God, but that they did not believe in the one and only God who



created the universe and gives life. The gods in whom they trusted cannot speak, respond, or listen to the prayers and supplications of their worshipers. They cannot provide for them or rescue them from danger when their adherents call upon their names. Above all, they cannot offer eternal life! For those **without Christ** and **without God**, they have nothing to which

they can look forward; life is as good as it will get now because the future only holds a sentence of death and eternal separation from the God who created them and loves them unconditionally.

Despite the bleak picture painted by Paul of this existence **without Christ**, he ends this section on a positive note when he announces that **in Christ Jesus** those **who**



**were far off have now been brought near by the blood of Christ** (v. 13). There is hope for those who will accept it! They have become one people in Christ. Those once alienated and excluded from **the covenants of promise** for the people of God have now received an invitation to participate **by the blood of Christ**. Jesus offers this gift to anyone regardless of their ethnicity, socio-economic background, level of education, or whatever sinful activities in which they may have engaged previously (see [Gal 3:28](#)). As the people of God, the church represents the most diverse community in the world that functions together in unity with love to glorify the Lord. Although we won't all have the same spiritual gifts, talents, or roles, in Christ we all have the same status—we're equal because we have all been saved **by the blood**. Therefore, we can fellowship with any Christian around the world whether or not we speak the same language or share the same culture; we have a common bond in Christ that unites us and overcomes our differences.

### ***Ephesians 2:14-18***

#### ***FELLOWSHIP WITHOUT BARRIERS:***

Paul now highlights the reason we can have fellowship with such a diverse group of people. Christ has broken down all the barriers that separate people and leveled the playing field by offering grace to everyone. In Christ, we should celebrate the diversity (not sinfulness) in which God has brought together people from every nation, culture, tribe, and language. Despite our differences, we all have one thing in common: we are sinners and need a Savior.



As humans, we have a natural tendency to surround ourselves with people who share similar circumstances in life. They may have similar interests as we do, participate in the same hobbies or sports, have the same level of education, have a similar sense of humor, have the same perspective or outlook on life, or share a similar type of family background or composition. In Christ, however, these barriers that tend to separate us, humanly speaking, don't matter; in Christ we have become one community united for one purpose to glorify our Savior.

### ***ABOLISHMENT OF ENMITY:***

Paul, therefore, declares Christ **Himself is our peace** because He **has made us both one** and **broken down the middle wall of separation** (v. 14). We see two realms of **peace** in this expression. First, we have **peace** with God through Christ because He has overcome sin and death by removing God’s wrath against our sin through His blood. Second, we can have **peace** with each other as human beings in the church because the **peace** that we have with the Lord has transformed our lives and way of thinking (see [Col 3:15](#)). When we formerly lived in sin, we strove not only against God, but also against other people because we had a selfish perspective. We wanted what benefited us the most, so it became a competition to get that which we sought—whether popularity, power, possessions, prestige, or wealth. In Christ, however, we have been transformed from the pursuit of competition because of our selfishness to seeking to honor the Lord in all we do. When we adopt Christ’s outlook, we will have **peace** with others in the church because we will seek to serve and to give rather than to be served and to get.

Why do we still need to work at maintaining peace within the church? What are some obstacles or barriers that we must overcome to maintain peace?

Question  
# 4

Moreover, Christ removes the barriers that separate us which Paul calls here **the middle wall of separation** (v. 14). Although scholars have made many proposals as to what this expression actually refers—based on the context here in Ephesians which speaks about the unification of Jews and Gentiles within the church—it seems most likely to refer to the barrier of the temple in Jerusalem which separated the court of the Gentiles from the inner courts where the Jews could worship. This barrier which symbolized the separation of God’s people from the secular nations had become a way to exclude people from **the covenants of promise**—which God never intended (see [Isa 56:6-7](#)). With this **wall of separation** figuratively removed, God extended His gospel and call to salvation to all people. Although there is a fundamental difference between the people of God and those who have no relationship with Him, within the church we can freely have fellowship in Christ with any believer and we all have the freedom to worship our

Lord and Savior together in one body without any distinction.

What barriers do we as humans sometimes establish that separate us from other people?

Question  
# 5

Not only did Christ tear **down the middle wall of separation**, but through His physical death (i.e. **His flesh**) He also **abolished the enmity** in the **law of the commandments to create in Himself one new man from two** (v. 15). If we fail to read this phrase closely within its context, we may entirely misunderstand it. Paul did *not* say that Christ abolished the law, for this would conflict with Jesus' own teaching (see [Matt 5:17](#)). On the contrary, He **abolished the enmity** or hostility between the Jews and Gentiles based on **the law**, whereby some Jews saw themselves as morally superior and favored by God which in their minds allowed them to exclude the Gentiles on the basis that they did not have **the law**. Through His death on **the cross**, however, Christ made **peace** and **reconciled** everyone who would confess their sin and repent into **one body** (v. 16). In other words, we all receive salvation in the same way through God's grace no matter what we may have done.

Today, some Christians may wrongly feel this sense of superiority, forgetting the grace that God has repeatedly shown them over the years. In fact, this type of attitude may cause them to talk down to others, humiliate them by condemning them, and perhaps even in extreme cases even to write them off as hopeless. For example, some Christians may see someone outwardly covered with tattoos and piercings looking as though life has been rough and simply dismiss them as hopeless. Still, others may compare sins and qualify them as big or small; once again, they may dismiss them as hopeless, believing that God could never forgive them. However, none of us can stand as morally superior to anyone else because we all have sinned and we all are saved by the same grace. Therefore, let us cast aside any perceived differences that we may have and realize that God's grace is deserved by none, but freely given to all who will accept it.

In what ways do some Christians see themselves as morally superior to others which leads to an exclusionary attitude?

Question  
# 6

**vv. 17-18**

**ACCESS IN THE SPIRIT TO THE FATHER:**

Paul begins this final section with a declaration that Christ **came** to preach **peace**

## Instruct

to those **who were afar** and **those who were near** (v. 17). The word preach here is synonymous with the gospel. Jesus **came** to die for both the Gentile and the Jew respectively without distinction! In fact, Isaiah reminds us, "I create the fruit of the lips: 'Peace, peace to him who is far off and to him who is near,' says the Lord, 'And I will heal him.'" In this context, "heal" doesn't mean a mere physical healing, but spiritual healing through salvation.

As a result, those who have a relationship with Christ also **have access by one Spirit**



**to the Father** (v. 18). The moment we confess our sin and repent, surrendering our lives to Him and inviting Jesus to come into our hearts, He sends the Holy **Spirit** to dwell in us. Consequently, the Holy **Spirit** marks us as children who belong to God ([Eph 1:13-14](#)), helps us to communicate with our heavenly Father ([Rom 8:26-27](#)), reminds us of Jesus' teaching

in Scripture ([John 14:26](#)), guides our decisions when we surrender to His control ([Gal 5:25](#)), and according to this context He grants us **access to the Father** both now and for eternity. We don't need another mediator like a pastor or priest to intercede for us, but we ourselves have direct **access** to our **Father** in heaven. Through prayer guided by **the Spirit**, we have immediate **access to the Father** at any time day or night. We have a God who wants to have a relationship with us; He wants us to bring our petitions, concerns, and burdens unto Him.

In what ways do we have access to the Father through the Spirit? How should this access to the Father affect the way that we live?

Question  
# 7



In the introduction, we observed the need for passports when we visit foreign countries. For those of us who have a relationship with Christ, we are already citizens of heaven which means that the US is not our home and we are only temporary residents living here. One day as we enter into heaven we will present our figurative heavenly passport stamped and sealed with the blood of Jesus and we will hear, “Welcome home!” What a glorious day of celebration that will be! When we get to heaven, we will meet people from every nation, tribe, and tongue and we will all gather around the throne to praise our Savior for His glorious gift. We will not be divided by class, by education, by ethnicity, or anything else, but we will all be hand-in-hand worshiping our Lord.

At FBCFW, we need to take the gospel into the world to all the nations without distinction beginning right here in our own community. People need to hear the truth that there is only one way to salvation through Christ, but that gift is available to all regardless of what they may have done. Although we should never celebrate sin or its effects as outlined in Scripture, we should celebrate the diversity of people in God’s community—that is the church—who share one thing in common: we have all accepted Christ’s gracious gift and have been reconciled to Him and to one another. As we celebrate this diversity according to Scripture, let us use our own distinctive testimonies and spiritual gifts to share the gospel with everyone we meet. Let us end the lesson, therefore, by asking ourselves one question: Am I using my distinct testimony and gifts to glorify God and reach others? If not, let’s pray about how we can start today and join what God is doing through FBCFW already.

## ***Incorporate***

In the world around us, what obstacles or barriers do you see that prevent people from coming to Christ?

As a community / church, how can we overcome cultural barriers to take the gospel to the world beginning right here in Fort Worth?

Why is it important for us to live at peace with other members in the church and be unified in our goal as the world watches?

## ***Journal: Document God's Work***

*February 10, 2019*



# *The Foundation of the Community*

## *Ephesians 2:19-22*

Focal Verse:

“Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.”

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Ephesians 2:13



## Introduce

In North Texas, we have a high concentration of clay in our soil which expands and contracts with moisture or the lack thereof and can wreak havoc on foundations. As a result, the foundations of our buildings must be built properly to ensure minimal settling and avoid major problems as the structures age. Well-intentioned commercials often remind us of the signs of a faulty foundation: cracks on the walls, ceilings, or floors, doors that won't open or close properly, and in worse cases a slant to the entire building. When a building has such a bad foundation, these warning signs become evident and visible and can create many more serious problems other than mere inconvenience. In the worst-case scenario, it can cause the entire structure to fail and collapse.

Toward the end of 2018, for instance, many of us may recall seeing on the news about the parking garage in Irving that collapsed and destroyed several cars in the process. As engineers studied the collapse, they determined that the extremely wet Fall we had along with the clay in the soil caused the faulty foundation to crumble and give way. In addition to this parking garage, we have experienced a foundation problem much closer



to home. Although the sanctuary of our church isn't in danger of collapsing structurally, it too has problems with its foundation due to faulty construction. As the building has settled, the cracks have gotten wider, the doors harder to open, and the seams in the roof more susceptible to leaking when it rains. Thankfully, however, God has given us the resources through the three-year capital stewardship program, "It's Time," to correct some of these issues.

Yet, these two examples serve as a good reminder for all of us to exercise great care that we build our lives upon the right foundation. If we fail to build our lives on Christ, we will have eternal consequences which we must face. A foundation built upon anything or anyone apart from Christ only leads to destruction. As important as it is to have a good physical foundation for our homes and businesses, it is even more

## Introduce

important to have the right spiritual foundation. In [2:19-22](#), Paul reminds the Ephesians that they must build their community upon none other than Jesus Christ who functions as the “chief cornerstone” which gives the church truth and integrity. Regardless of what storms or problems we face in life as an individual or community, a life built upon Christ will never falter or fail. He will provide us with the proper guidance and strength to persevere and succeed when we seek Him first and He will enable us to continue to mature and grow together as believers.

Key  
Question

What are the signs of a life built upon a good foundation?

### Ephesians 2:19-20a

#### ***WE ARE FELLOW CITIZENS:***

We will open this lesson where the one last week concluded by reminding ourselves of where our citizenship lies. Introducing these last verses of chapter two with **therefore**, Paul draws a conclusion to the previous section which demonstrated how two widely diverse groups became one community through Christ. Although the Gentiles were once considered aliens among the people of God, they **are no longer strangers and foreigners** in the church, **but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God** (v. 19). As blessed as we are to live in such a great country as the United States, this is not truly our home if we have a relationship with Christ. Although we call ourselves Americans and permanently reside in the US, our citizenship is already in heaven. In fact, elsewhere Paul states expressly, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" ([Phil 3:20](#)).

As **citizens** of heaven and **members of God's household**, we have the inheritance which we discussed in chapter one, but we also have the responsibility to represent our heavenly Father well. Even though God should not be impugned or implicated in our wrong choices or sin, our behavior and character does reflect upon Him in the eyes of the world. To help us understand how impressions can be formed wrongly at times, we can appeal to a more modern example. In June of 2004, I was in Kenya on a mission trip when former President Ronald Reagan died. With the news of his death spreading throughout the world, many Kenyans began to discuss their perception of the United States. With his start in movies particularly the Western genre as well as his love for his ranch in California, Reagan portrayed the quintessential image of a cowboy. While riding in a taxi,



I had a conversation with the driver about Ronald Reagan and life in the US. Because of what he had seen on television, he insisted that all Americans dressed in Western attire,

## Instruct

lived on a ranch, and rode horses; he even called Reagan the “cowboy President.” For those of us who live in the US, we know that what we see on television and hear on the news doesn’t represent every American—not even here in Texas does everyone wear boots, a Stetson, and a gigantic belt buckle with blue jeans. The perception of how some live and dress has become generalized and unfairly projected upon others. In the same way when we claim to have a relationship with Christ and we bear His name, how we live can be projected upon Him—unfairly at times when we sin and misbehave. As **members of God’s household**, we have a great responsibility to live up to our new heritage as God’s children; therefore, we should live holy lives that reflect our heavenly Father’s character. In fact, Jesus even teaches that we should “be perfect, just as [our] Father in heaven is perfect” (Matt 5:48). God hasn’t left us guessing what it means to be holy, but He has outlined it clearly in Scripture.

How does the way we live our lives reflect upon the Lord?

Question  
# 1

As **fellow citizens** in this community / church, we must have a common constitution by which we abide. Just as we have the Constitution and Bill of Rights in the US, God has given us the Bible which explains our rights and privileges as His children as well as our duties and obligations as **citizens** of heaven. Whereas the Bill of Rights guarantees “free speech,” the Bible tells us how we ought to speak wisely and reverently as God’s children. For example, the Bible reminds us that our speech should honor and glorify the Lord and edify others ([Psalm 141:3](#); [Eph 4:29, 5:4](#); and [Col 4:6](#)). When we have been freed from sin through a relationship with Christ, He will transform our attitude and speech. As a result, we have an obligation to represent the Lord as **members of His household** and build community rather than tearing it down with profane language and insulting speech. Just as in this one example, we ought to build our lives only upon the **foundation** of the truth of Scripture.

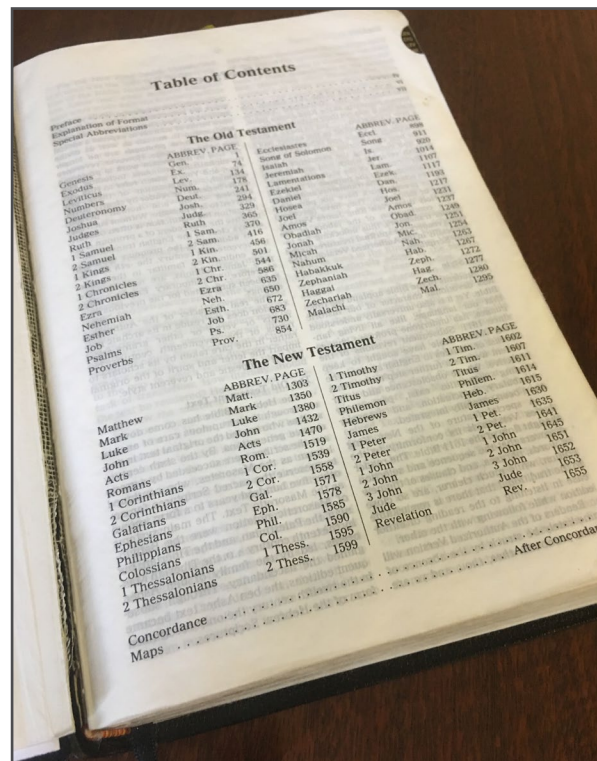
What are our obligations to the Lord as heavenly citizens as outlined in Scripture?

Question  
# 2

Paul explains that we **have been built on the foundation of the apostle and**



**prophets** (v. 20a). Generally, **the apostles and prophets** can be regarded as commissioned or sent to speak God’s divine Word. The **prophets**, for example, spoke the Word of the Lord for their day, warning against forsaking God and foretelling what would transpire in the future unless the people repent and turn to Him. They also prophesied about the coming of the Messiah who would save the world through His death and resurrection. Similarly, the **apostles** were commissioned to testify about the teachings and events they had seen, heard, and experienced during their time with the Messiah here on earth ([1 John 1:1-3](#)). As eyewitnesses, the **apostles** then passed down their teaching about Christ orally at first to the church and then later recorded the events in what we call the New Testament today ([Acts 2:42](#)). Consequently, taken together in this context **the apostles and prophets** refer to the entire Bible—both the Old and New Testaments—which points to Christ and gives instructions about



how we should live just as Christ did as an example for us ([2 Tim 3:16-17](#))! Unfortunately, we live in a fast-paced and hectic world that leaves us with little free time, so we try to take shortcuts to get the job done quickly. If this shortcut involves failing to read from God’s Word daily, we have done ourselves a grave disservice! Sometimes we may still read “spiritual” works whether books, articles, or even this curriculum without reading the Bible itself and hearing God speak through His Word. Although God inspires people to write and speak today based on His Word, we cannot fail to read Scripture along with these other works so that we can have a proper perspective of what God has said. If we don’t read Scripture, how can we accurately judge whether something is doctrinally or theologically sound? We have nothing but opinion on which we can base our judgment. Instead, we must read God’s inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word where He has given us explicit truth.

What is the danger of relying on other works of literature without reading the Bible first?

Question # 3

The Bible should be the sole **foundation** for our lives because it reveals God’s character

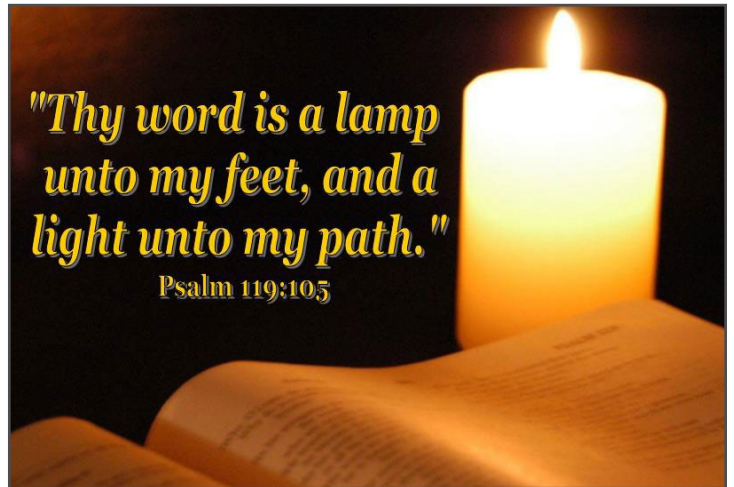
## Instruct

unto us, it explains the plan of salvation and restoration through Christ, it outlines God's expectations for us, and it provides the principles for living a successful life.

Any other foundation will crumble and fail under its own weight! As God's Word, the Bible is truth and can be understood sufficiently on its own with the help of the Holy Spirit apart from any other outside source ([2 Peter 1:19-21](#)). It doesn't contain the mere teaching of mortal man, but it is the divinely inspired Word of God which provides the fundamental teaching for life

which can still be applied today according to the historical and literary context of its pages. We shouldn't use our beliefs and traditions to "confirm" Scripture, but we should use Scripture to shape our beliefs and traditions. Many times, we get this backwards and we focus on our experiences and our knowledge instead of what God's Word says. Focusing on man's opinion—whether our own or others—often obscures the truth and, in today's world, seemingly makes it relative.

Some cultic religions, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons, claim to adhere to the truth, but they in fact have errantly altered it according to their own beliefs and opinions. According to their publications, the Jehovah's Witnesses (i.e. *Watchtower*) and the Mormons (i.e. *The Book of Mormon*) wrongly teach that Jesus was not the divine Son of God, but achieved a status of divinity through His work and teaching. The Bible, however, teaches that Jesus has existed eternally as God even before the creation of the universe. Never at any moment did Jesus cease to be God—even after being born of a virgin and donning flesh to dwell among us, He was God—Immanuel! To combat such false ideas, we must know God's Word intimately. Although this is a clear example of heresy or false teaching, sometimes the errors are more subtle and more difficult to discern. For this reason, we must pray daily that the Holy Spirit will reveal the truth to us in Scripture so that we might apply it diligently in our lives.



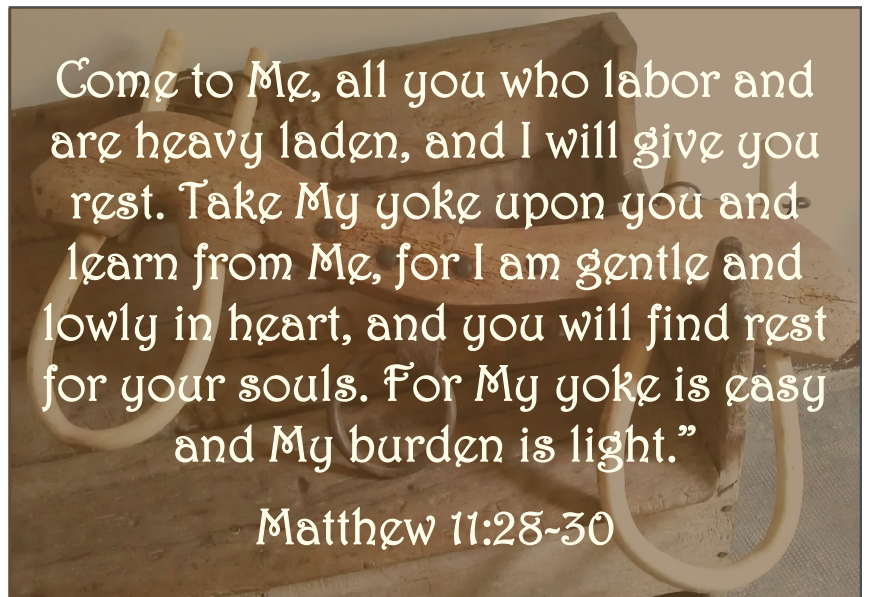
In what ways does the enemy use deception to obscure the truth in God's Word? What examples can you cite that demonstrate subtle errors in the world's teaching that conflict with Scripture?

Question  
# 4

***CHRIST IS THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE:***

Technically, **the foundation of the apostles and prophets** rests upon Christ and His promises and teachings; thus, Jesus plays an even more special role as **the chief cornerstone** (v. 20b). In our modern understanding, the **cornerstone** represents a decorative piece installed last with the date of construction and other details inscribed on it; to us, it has very little function or use. However, this was not the case with the **cornerstone** in ancient times. It served two primary and key functions: 1) it often bore the load or weight of the entire structure and 2) it also determined the straightness of the building. If the **cornerstone** were not square and straight, the rest of the building would be out of alignment; it would be crooked and may even collapse. Likewise, if it were faulty or defective, the entire building would be in jeopardy of crumbling as the stone cracked and gave way! Therefore, the **cornerstone** is the most important part of the **foundation** which is the first stone laid by the builder.

Just like an entire building depends upon the **cornerstone** for strength and stability, we should depend upon Christ alone. As the first stone laid in our lives, Jesus ought to receive the priority; we can't build everything else the way we want first and then come back and insert the **cornerstone**. We must seek Christ first and depend upon Him in every area of our lives: marriage, family, relationships, career, finances, possessions, hobbies, and the general course of our lives. If we don't build our lives upon Christ as our Rock, then when



the storms of life arise we have nothing on which to stand ([Matt 7:23-29](#)). We will face ruination and destruction according to our own human perspective. Without Christ as the center of our relationships, for instance, we will face conflict and division. Without Christ as the center of our lives, we will risk making unwise decisions about our careers, finances, and almost anything else. On the contrary, when we have Christ as the center of our lives, then we can weather the storms that the enemy may hurl at us. Because we live in a fallen world, we can't expect everything to be perfect and go smoothly all



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the time, but we can expect to count on Christ when things go awry and we can always depend upon Him for strength and wisdom when we need it most.

Unfortunately, however, many people may go through life living the way they want without seeking Christ first and only turn to Him as a last resort when all other options have been tried. Moreover, people try to mask their problems and pretend that everything is alright. Think of a building that has a **foundation** problem. We can perform some cosmetic fixes to hide the problem; we can rehang doors, we can put spackle over the cracks, we can move furniture or pictures to cover imperfections, we can install new carpets to hide the gaps in the flooring, but in reality the problem still exists. People often try to hide problems in their lives rather than depend upon Christ to help overcome them. They may try to engage in good works and acts of service, but without Christ they will leave a void. They may try to pretend to be happy and ignore the problem altogether, but inwardly they are depressed and hurting because they won't allow Christ to assume control and help them. However hard people may try, the problem still exists and they have nowhere else to turn. The person to whom they should have turned first is their last desperate attempt. Yet, as **fellow citizens** and **saints** we must remind one another to give Christ the priority and depend upon Him for everything—from the beginning to the end of our lives!

In what ways do people try to hide their problems rather than depend upon the Lord?

Question  
# 5

Not only should we depend upon Christ for strength and wisdom, we should also use



Him as the standard by which we measure our lives. We ought to test everything in our lives to make sure it reflects the purity and holiness of **the chief cornerstone** Himself—otherwise we ought not engage in it! As humans, we tend to measure ourselves against other imperfect standards so that we don't seem as bad as we truly are. We often point to their faults



and emphasize their indiscretions while highlighting our own perceived achievements and goodness. When we measure ourselves against these imperfect examples, we have no way of knowing if the path we take is straight. When we measure our attitudes, character, and the decisions we make against Christ, we will see when we go astray and don't reflect His perfect will in our lives. Consequently, we can allow Him to take the necessary steps to correct us, get us back on track, and continue to mature according to His Word.

Although we have examined two ways that Christ functions in our lives individually as the **cornerstone**, here in Ephesians the primary emphasis lies on His function in guiding the church as a whole. In [1:22](#), we have already seen that Christ "is head over all things to the church." As the head, He guides the church, corrects the church when it errs, and unites the members for one purpose. As the **cornerstone**, Christ helps the church to judge its progress and strengthens the resolve of the body to participate in His will. When we have Christ as **the chief cornerstone**, it will reduce division and potential conflict in the community because we won't look to our own interests, but to those of Christ. Moreover, it will reduce competition because we won't desire to jockey for position, but we will seek to use our spiritual gifts to glorify the Father and edify others in the community. Therefore, with Christ as the **cornerstone** we can measure our progress both as a community and as individuals. In a world affected and inundated by sin, we need a perfect standard on which to build our lives and protect us from the onslaught of the temptation to make the wrong choices. Only Christ can provide that strength and stability in our community when we make Him **the chief cornerstone**.

In what way can Christ help us measure our progress as a community of believers here at FBCFW?

Question  
# 5

## ***Ephesians 2:21-22***

### **WE ARE UNDER CONSTRUCTION:**

Paul ends this section by describing the church as a **building**, specifically a **holy temple**, which **grows** and **is being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit** (vv. 21-22). He uses this metaphor to emphasize the role of Christ (i.e. **in whom**) in uniting the church **together** for the purpose of being God's **holy** representatives. As a community, Christ joins (i.e. **fits**) us **together** and causes us to grow **into a**

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**holy temple in the Lord.** The **temple**, like the tabernacle in the exodus generation, represented **the dwelling place of God** and reminded the people of His presence among them. Now, the **Spirit** has made us God's **holy** habitation by indwelling our hearts; therefore, we serve God by reminding others about His transformative presence in our own lives and pointing them into a relationship with Him.

Unlike a regular **building**, however, construction on the people within God's community never ceases; it's a continuous, life-long process. For this reason, Paul refers



to the process of being made holy in Christ in the present tense: the people of the community **grow into a holy temple**. The idea of growth here does not primarily indicate numerical growth, but rather it speaks of personal growth towards the maturity for each member of the community **together**. Through encouragement, edification, and

accountability first to the **Spirit** and then to each other, we can mature as a community whereby we become more Christ-like each day and reflect the character of our Savior to the world around us. In our Western mindset, we tend to emphasize the importance of individual growth and maturity, but here the focus is on the community as a whole! Although each member of the community must do his or her own part, we must realize that we're not isolated on our own journey, but we are working **together** to accomplish the goal to which the Lord has called all of us.

Why is it important to grow together as a community?

Question  
# 6

Even with all our technology and social media that we have today, we still live relatively isolated and independent lives. We may see ourselves as a member of a community, but we tend to focus on our own small part or role in it instead of the bigger picture. To grow in Christ the way that Paul suggests, we must develop a spirit of cooperation rather than competition in three areas in the church. First, we need

to establish good communication both with the Lord through prayer and with other members in the church. We must edify each other to the praise of the Lord and we must resolve problems amicably in a scriptural way when they arise. Second, we must be accountable to the Lord and apply the principles outlined in His Word; therefore, we need to receive encouragement from other members when we live faithfully, but we also need to accept biblical correction when we err.

Third, we must exercise integrity in everything so that others may see and glorify Christ because of the holy way in which we live. Elsewhere, Paul exclaims, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” ([Gal 2:20](#)). In other words, Christ should be visible through the way we live as a community; others shouldn’t see us, but they should see Christ in us—in the way we act, the way we serve, the way we speak, and the way we think. To reach the world as the Lord has called us, it requires us all to work together in Christ. We must see the big picture and how we fit into it, but we must also be unified in Christ sharing the same goal and the same purpose. When we grow together as one community working to mature in holiness and represent Christ as His holy ambassadors, we will see God do extraordinary things through our church.

In what ways can we grow together as a community so that we accomplish the purpose to which Christ has called us?

Question  
# 7

During the course of this week, we have learned the necessity of building our lives and community upon the foundation that cannot be shaken regardless of what comes against it. A foundation built upon anything other than Christ will fail. As great and wonderful as our country is and how effective our Constitution has been, it will one day cease to exist and the Constitution rendered useless—as will all human institutions. Just as physical buildings crumble and dissolve over time, human values, morals, emotions, and institutions will fade as well—nothing is permanent except the One who has no beginning and end and through whom the world came into existence, Jesus Christ our Lord. Therefore, we must trust and surrender to Him as the bedrock and cornerstone of our community unless the prevailing tides of the culture overwhelm us and derail our progress in Christ.

What practical steps can we take to prevent such destruction to infiltrate the community? First, we must seek the Lord in unity rather than our own personal desires and agendas. Second, we must remember from where God has brought us from the depths of our sin and see where He has now brought us so that we might use that same grace to encourage others and point them to Christ. Third, we must all serve together regardless of our backgrounds or experiences; we have all been bought with the same blood and called to the same purpose. Fourth, we must know the privilege that we have been given in Christ, but we must also recognize our responsibilities by faithfully studying Scripture together so that we may comprehend God's call to our community as a whole. Although we could say much more on this topic, we must simply remember that Christ is the cornerstone of our community and His Word is the foundation of our lives so that we may have life, unity, and live in holiness as God's children and members of His household.



## *Incorporate*

How do you use your citizenship in heaven to represent Christ to the world around us?

In what ways should the church rely on Christ as the chief cornerstone? How does this help when problems arise?

In what ways has God helped you to grow personally through Christ which you might mentor or teach others in the church?

*February 17, 2019*



# *The Function of the Community*

## *Ephesians 3:1-7*

Focal Verse:

“Of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.”

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Ephesians 3:7

## Introduce

Years ago, manual typewriters had a bare minimum number of keys which basically contained letters, numbers, and some commonly used punctuation marks and symbols. With this limited number of keys, nearly everyone who used a typewriter knew all its functions; therefore, they could utilize the machine to its fullest capability.

As technology advanced into the computer age, keyboards became more complex and had many more keys added which greatly increased the number of functions which could be performed. For



instance, some keyboards contain a key labeled "FN" in the lower left-hand corner while others have an entire series of keys at the top labeled "F1" to "F9." When pressed in combination with other keys, they perform a whole host of different "functions," but in most cases many of us never know exactly what these keys do and never even use these buttons at all.

Despite the keyboard's increased capability, many people cannot use it to its fullest potential because they don't understand all the functions its designer created it to do. Perhaps, some of us have taken a class on keyboarding to realize its full potential and get the most out of it; maybe some of us have used the "help" function or researched online to learn more about its capabilities; still others of us may have picked up tips by watching others or by asking a mentor a question about resolving a problem. Many of us, however, don't take the time to research or understand the full potential of the keyboard, so we mainly use it in a limited way just as we would a manual typewriter from decades past. Although we may "discover" some functions by accident or chance, to understand the potential of its functions fully we must make an intentional effort to study and learn.

Unfortunately, many believers don't understand the full potential of the church because they don't take time to learn the functions for which God designed it and with which He has so graciously invested us to perform. Unlike the modern keyboard, however, the functions of the church aren't complex or mysterious, but rather God

## Introduce

has clearly outlined them in Scripture. Therefore, we must take time to investigate the function of the church so that God can use us according to the full potential for which He created us. In [Ephesians 3:1-7](#), God led Paul to identify three primary functions of the church: to *dispense* grace, to *disciple* others, and to *declare* the gospel. Although the church has more than these three primary functions, when we understand them we will be able to impact the community in an extraordinary way which will honor the Lord and dramatically transform lives through the salvation He has graciously provided.

Key  
Question

What are the functions of the church that God created us to perform?



## Ephesians 3:1-2

### ***DISPENSE GRACE:***

Having detailed the inheritance of believers in a unified community built upon the foundation of Christ ([Eph 2:11-22](#)), Paul now turns to address our responsibilities in Christ and the nature of our ministry. Paul sets up his comments by highlighting his current situation of being imprisoned in Rome **for** the sake of the **Gentiles** (v. 1). In doing so, he wants to remind the Ephesians of the power of God's grace whereby Christ died for both Gentile and Jew to give both access to eternal life and equal standing in the church. Therefore, he doesn't focus on his circumstances per se, but rather he focuses on the fact that being a **prisoner of Christ** has given him an even greater opportunity to spread the gospel to all people. Paul doesn't view his imprisonment as tragic, unfortunate, or discouraging, but he regards it as beneficial for the cause to which Christ has called him. He doesn't go looking for trouble, but when it arises he doesn't shrink back in self-pity or despair; instead, he uses it as an opportunity to glorify the Lord and advance the kingdom of God despite his confinement.

### ***In-Depth Information***



*In [Acts 21:17-22:29](#), Luke gives the background for Paul's imprisonment. While visiting Jerusalem after his third missionary journey, men from Ephesus accompanied Paul; some Jews became incensed because they thought that he had brought these Gentiles into the temple and in their eyes defiled it ([Acts 21:28](#)). To avoid being killed by a murderous mob, Paul appealed to his Roman citizenship and right to receive a fair trial. Upon going through due process, he was eventually transferred to Rome where he was under house arrest awaiting trial under the Roman emperor to whom he had appealed during his trials in Caesarea Philippi.*

What happens when we focus on our circumstances rather than Christ?

Question  
# 1

We live in a society in which people desperately crave attention which they often seek by lamenting and complaining about all the bad things that happen to them. Many people want others to see them as victims of circumstance; they want people to take

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pity upon them and feel sorry for them, so they can “profit” from bad luck or tragedy—even when much of it is self-inflicted or even self-perceived. We certainly should



Depiction of Paul's house arrest in Rome.

have compassion upon people as Christ both commanded us and demonstrated for us, but we cannot let circumstances overshadow the ministry of proclaiming the gospel. As believers, we have a greater reward that awaits us because Christ is greater than our circumstances. We shouldn't become discouraged or despondent when things don't go our way, when we face persecution, or when we suffer. On the contrary, we should overcome our circumstances triumphantly in Christ

and use them to point others into a relationship with Him!

In what ways can we use our circumstances to point others into a relationship with Christ?

Question  
# 2

Next, Paul demonstrates one of the primary functions of ministry in the church through **the dispensation of grace which** God had **given** him **for** the Gentiles (i.e. **you**). The way the NKJV translates the phrase in verse two as “**if indeed you have heard**” seems to leave some doubt as to whether or not the Ephesians knew about this aspect of Paul's ministry personally; however, in this context, the Greek phrase actually expresses certainty: *since indeed you have heard*. They had **indeed** experienced first-hand the ministry **of grace which** God had **given** Paul to proclaim the gospel in their city for nearly three years and they had witnessed a radical transformation in the people of their city and region to turn from serving false gods to serve the One true and living God ([Acts 19:1-41](#)). Because so many people began a relationship with Christ and rejected the worship of the patron goddess of the city named Artemis, the profits of the silversmiths who produced her statues dramatically declined, causing a riot. Through this change in their community, the Ephesians had experienced the power of the gospel!

As believers, God has called us to extend His **grace** to all people through the

proclamation of the gospel. In Greek, the word translated **dispensation** more technically means stewardship and entails the management of a household. In effect, then, we have become managers of **God's grace** in His household—the church. In human terms, a manager in a business usually doesn't own the company, but instead he acts on behalf of the owner to oversee the daily operations and carry out the company's chief goal. Similarly, we as believers must demonstrate **God's grace** both through how we live and what we proclaim. We should never forget from where God has rescued us and how He has shown grace and mercy repeatedly to us. Consequently, the church should function as a community that offers forgiveness and seeks to restore people according to the grace of the Lord through the gospel. Therefore, we must ask ourselves this question: how well have we managed **God's grace** as members of His community here at FBCFW?



How can we extend God's grace to others in the church and in secular society?

Question  
# 3

Unfortunately, sometimes the church fails in this endeavor to manage **God's grace** because we expect God to extend **grace** to us, but we fail in our duty to demonstrate that same **grace** to others. The best example of this type of haughty, unforgiving attitude comes from a parable in [Matthew 18:21-35](#) told by Jesus. A king wanted to collect money from a certain debtor who owed him a phenomenal amount, but the man could not repay it. Ultimately, the king showed **grace** by forgiving the debt altogether and not sending the man to prison. However, this same man who had been forgiven of this tremendous debt had a fellow servant who owed him a much smaller, insignificant debt which he demanded to be repaid. Although his fellow servant pleaded for **grace** and mercy, the man would not relent and continued to demand his money—even grabbing him by the throat and having him cast into prison. The man had forgotten the extraordinary amount of **grace** that the king had once shown him! Through God's community, we must demonstrate and proclaim His **grace**! If people

don't find **grace**, forgiveness, and restoration scripturally applied in the church, where else will they find it? As a church, we should communicate the truth in love ([Eph 4:15](#)).



This doesn't mean that we should accept sin and tolerate rebellion to God, but that we should seek to point others to Christ who can restore them wholly (see [Gal 6:1](#)). To be good stewards of **God's grace** in the church, we must have the right perspective about our place in the community and about others. We shouldn't regard ourselves more highly than

we ought, but view ourselves as humble servants of the Lord (see [Rom 12:3](#)). When we see ourselves through the eyes of Christ, we realize how big our debt was He paid on our behalf. This leads us to be willing to forgive others ([Eph 4:32](#)), to love others ([Eph 5:2](#)), and to walk in the light with integrity ([Eph 5:8](#)). Therefore, we demonstrate **God's grace** in how we live holy lives and how we verbally proclaim the gospel to all people because we realize if it were not for **God's grace** we'd have no hope either.

In what ways has God shown you grace in your life?

Question  
# 4

One point that we often overlook is that ministry or service is a gift of **grace** to us from God. In fact, Paul points out **the dispensation of grace of God was given to me**. Typically, when we think about **God's grace** to us, we think about the sacrificial gift of His Son upon the cross; however, we also ought to view ministry as a gracious gift! God could have chosen anyone or anything to accomplish His will and fulfill His plan, but He uniquely and distinctively gifted us to participate by serving Him. When we view ministry as a gift of **grace**, it should radically transform our service to Him in this community! Although ministry can become tiring and difficult at times, we will never become disheartened, but we will participate joyfully and enthusiastically remembering the **grace of God**. We won't view ministry as a chore, but as a privilege and it will become a priority in our lives rather than an afterthought.

In what ways can viewing ministry as a gift of grace from God radically change our view of service in the church and community?

Question  
# 5



## ***Ephesians 3:3-5***

### ***DISCIPLE OTHERS:***

Next, Paul describes how God sent him to disciple the Ephesians by making known the **revelation** of the **mystery** so that they **may understand the knowledge in the mystery of Christ** (vv. 3-4). In fact, Paul is writing this very letter to remind them and explain in more detail this **mystery** about which he has **already briefly written in [Ephesians 1:9-10 and 2:11-22](#)**. Paul clearly explains that the **mystery** refers to how Christ united two very different groups, namely the Jews and Gentiles, into one body—the church ([Eph 3:6](#)). Because Christ died for all and offered eternal life to anyone who would accept it, both groups receive the same inheritance and have equal status as God’s children, being joint-heirs with Christ. Amazingly, through Christ, God overcomes any barriers and differences that we may have as humans—whether ethnic, cultural, linguistic, educational, economic, or even spiritual barriers in terms of the specific sins that we have committed. Through Christ, God unites us into one body who can worship Him, serve Him, and represent Him according to the primary goal of bringing glory and honor to His name!

To understand our place in the community fully according to Scripture, we need others whom God has helped to mature in their faith to come alongside of us and teach us the

basic tenets and principles of God’s Word. This doesn’t negate the need for personal study through a quiet time spent alone with God, but it does reflect the need in the church for mature believers to disciple others and to give them insight into God’s Word which He has revealed unto them. Thus, Paul emphasizes that God had **made known to** him this **mystery**



which he now sought to help the church **understand**. For this reason, God has given us different gifts in the church, such as teaching, to help His community mature (see [Eph 4:11-12](#)). Since we live in a fiercely independent-minded society, many people don’t value corporate instruction and think that they can learn on their own better regardless of the wisdom and experience that others may have. God, however, never designed

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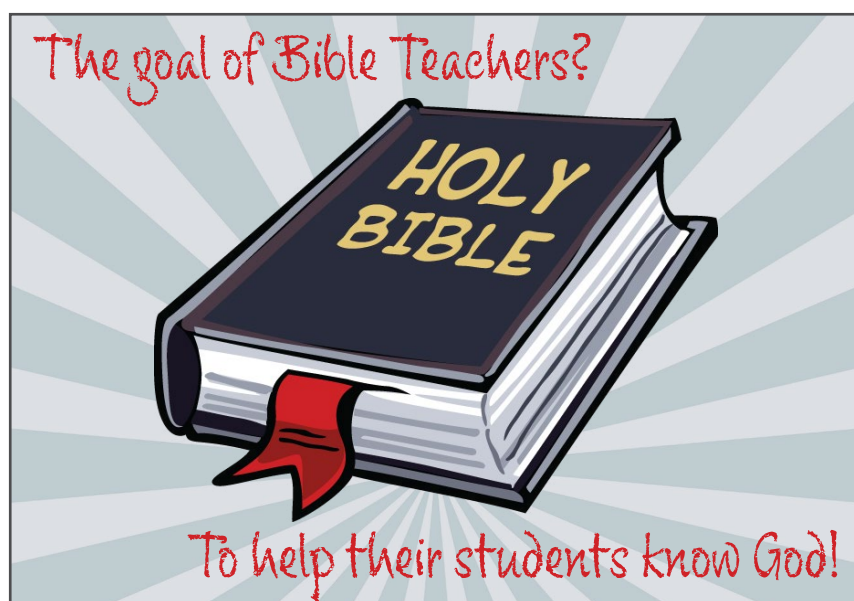
us to function in isolation, but rather to grow together as a community, learning from each other!

What skills and gifts has God given you that you could use to teach others?

Question  
# 6

To disciple others in the community effectively, we must rely on the **Holy Spirit** to reveal the meaning of Scripture to us and guide us in our teaching. Hence, we must realize “that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” ([2 Pet 1:20-21](#)). In Ephesians, therefore, Paul stresses that this **mystery in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, but it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets** (v. 5). Through both the historical and literary context of His Word, God communicates timeless principles which we can learn and apply with the aid of the Holy Spirit so we can live abundant lives in Christ which honor Him. Therefore, we must hear God speak what He has clearly **revealed** in His Word and not rely on mere mortal philosophies and teachings. God’s Word has the power to save and transform because it is His divine communication to us rather than man’s attempt to understand and figure out the world on his own.

Although God gives us insight into Scripture as we study privately, He has invested members of the community, such as Paul, with the ability to explain His **revelation**



to us in greater detail and clarity. Today, God has equipped members of this body with special skills to understand and communicate His Word so that the entire body may be edified and grow together. Thus, God has equipped some teachers with the knowledge of the biblical languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), the knowledge of biblical history in detail, and the ability to

use common examples and illustrations to help teach a particular principle. In addition, God has granted us with different experiences and perspectives that enable us to teach

with greater practical perception. We must remember, however, that our experiences never confirm God's Word, but that His Word validates and explains our experiences. In short, God has put us into a community because we need each other to hold one another accountable and help each other learn and mature in Christ, so that we can proclaim the gospel without hindrance and with the utmost skill and precision.

Why is it important that we are part of groups in the church which offer discipleship through the teaching of Scripture? Why should we invite others to join us?

Question  
# 7

### *Ephesians 3:6-7*

#### **DECLARE THE GOSPEL :**

Paul reaches the climax of his observations when he declares the content of his teaching and message. God worked effectively through him by making him **a minister according to the gift of grace** to proclaim **that the Gentiles are fellow heirs of the same body and partakers of His promises in Christ through the gospel** (vv. 6-7).

Like Paul, we must be intentional about declaring the gospel to all people. To all people means that we must proclaim the gospel to those who love us (i.e. our family and friends) and to our enemies; we are to share it with the outcast just as much as with the popular; we are to share it with those condemned by the world as committing grievous sins just as



much as those the world considers good and decent people. We are to share the gospel with everyone we meet! We can't assume that all people know the gospel or have even heard it proclaimed, so we must be active in the secular community and "on mission" all the time. God has called us to take the gospel into all the world and not sit passively or idly as the world marches down a path of destruction.

Paul was an **effective minister** not merely because scores of people were saved under his ministry, but because he allowed the **power** of God to work through him. Likewise, we aren't failures if we go and tell others and they reject the salvation offered through

## Instruct

the gospel. We must remember that they despised and rejected Christ Himself. Where we will fail is when we don't go and share the gospel at all! As an adjunct professor at Southwestern Seminary for several years, I taught an apologetics course which helped students to defend the existence of God as well as demonstrate that the resurrection best explains the empty tomb. One of the course requirements was that they had to share their paper and what they learned in class with someone who did not have a relationship with Christ.

To prepare them from the varied responses they might face, I constantly reminded them that their job was simply to be vessels through whom the **Spirit** worked; the **Holy Spirit** does the convicting and saving. I wanted them to understand that the **Holy Spirit**, therefore, isn't just part of the process; He orchestrates it from beginning to end! We must make ourselves available and allow Him to work through us to accomplish His purpose. As a result, God equips, enables, and empowers us to accomplish the work to which He has called us. Let us, therefore, trust Him and devote our lives to His service so that we might see the mighty hand of God at work!

How does the Holy Spirit help us to share the gospel?

Question  
# 8



When we know the full function of something like a keyboard, we should use it to its fullest potential; otherwise, we do ourselves and others a disservice. Knowing the full potential of the church in Christ, therefore, we must allow the Lord to work through us and use us to do that to which He has called us from the beginning. As a community of believers, we function as God's representatives by demonstrating God's grace to others, discipling others to participate in service, and declaring the gospel to all people. When we do not use our gifts and abilities to honor the Lord through our service in the community, we do a disservice to Him. God wants to involve us in His work and has called us to do extraordinary things when we rely wholly upon Him.

Although some of us opine for the "good ol' days," the best days lie ahead of us when we seek the Lord and rely upon Him. Just as God has done extraordinary things in the past through His people, including here in FBCFW, He wants to accomplish extraordinary things through us today! Let's commit to pray that God will use us to start a mighty movement in Fort Worth and around the world so that we can see revival among His people and salvation of the lost. Let us also commit to make ourselves available to accomplish His purpose. This will mean that we must make sacrifices on our part; it means that we will have to trust the Lord to do things which we ourselves cannot do, but in the end He will work effectively with great power to make His name great and we will see His community grow in both number and maturity.

## ***Incorporate***

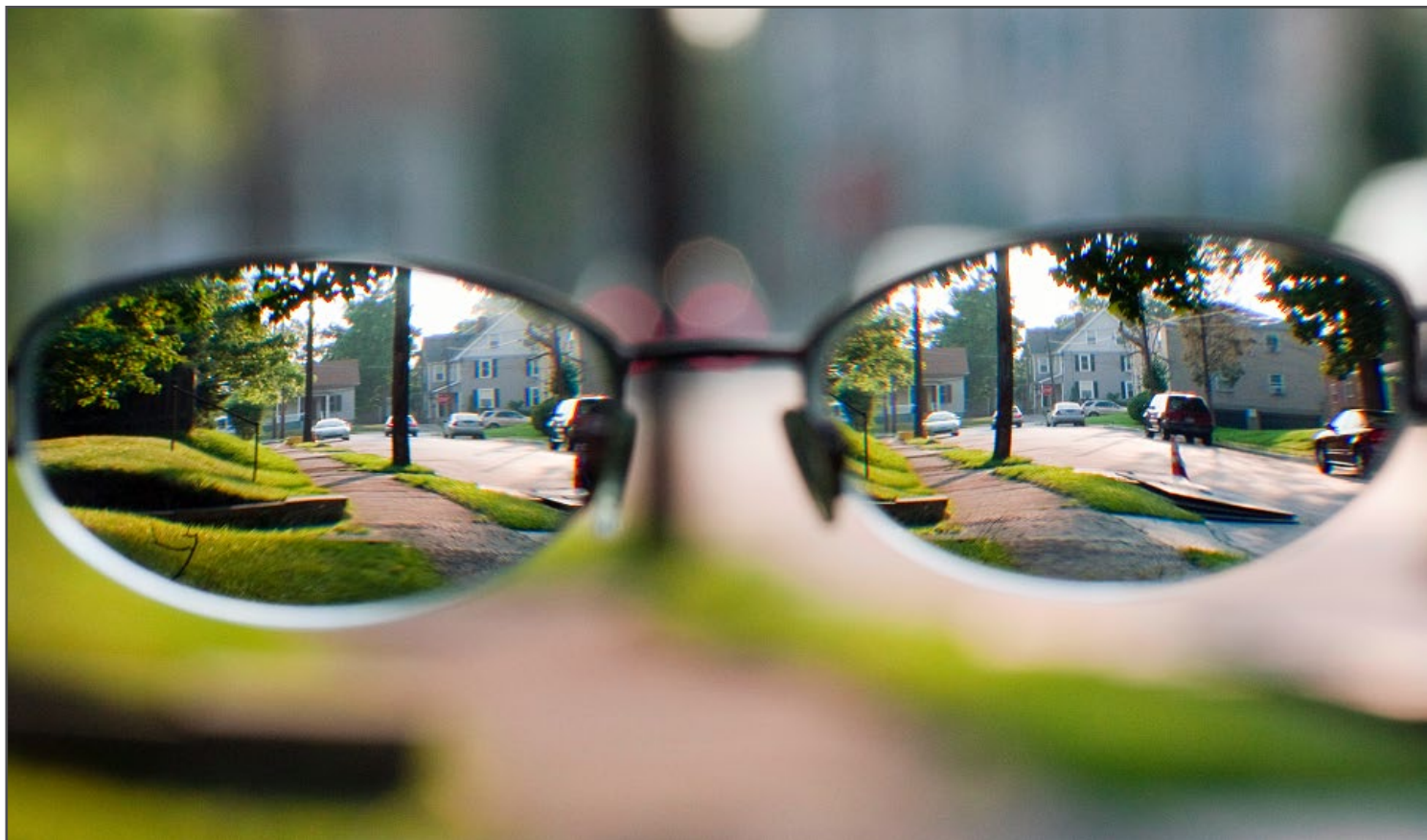
In what ways can we share the grace of God as FBCFW right here in Fort Worth?

In what ways does FBCFW disciple believers and help them to mature together as one body? How can you be involved in the process?

How effective are we as a community in declaring the gospel? In what ways can we more effectively share the gospel right here in Fort Worth?

## ***Journal: Document God's Work***

*February 24, 2019*



# *The Focus of the Community*

## *Ephesians 3:8-13*

Focal Verse:

*"To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."*

*Ephesians 3:8*

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## Introduce

In the movie *The Fifth Quarter* inspired by true events, the Wake Forest football team overcame overwhelming odds to advance to the ACC championship game after the fifteen-year-old younger brother of their star linebacker died in a car crash. Just before the championship game, the team gathered in the locker room for a motivational speech to help them maintain focus on the task at hand. As the team listened intently, they heard a story about a group of Texans who had traveled to Alaska to help build a pipeline to transport oil some eight hundred miles from Prudhoe Bay on the Arctic Ocean in the north to Valdez in the south during the 1970s. Working throughout the year in the brutally cold Alaskan temperatures side-by-side with native Eskimos, the Texans rarely lasted a full day at work while the Eskimos worked relentlessly without succumbing to the weather.



Perplexed, the company constructing the pipeline wanted to understand why the Eskimos could work tirelessly in the cold weather without showing any ill effects, but the Texans could not. The company paid for a number of physiological tests on the two groups to determine if something differed in their blood composition, skin thickness, or other physical attributes that contributed to their success or failure. Surprisingly, however, the physiological tests showed no difference between the two groups. As a result, the company turned to psychological tests to determine what factor their mindset played in their ability to withstand the cold. After conducting these tests, the researchers found that the Eskimos focused on the job and concentrated on finishing the work while the Texans focused on their circumstances, particularly the weather. When we concentrate on external circumstances, we tend to lose focus and become distracted and overwhelmed, causing us to abandon our task. In life, we face many distractions every day which could cause us to lose focus on Christ and abandon the task that He has given us. The storms of life can take many forms such as adversity in relationships, conflict in the family, financial difficulties, or health problems. As a

## Introduce

community of believers, however, we can't allow these adversities to shift our focus from Christ and cause us to abandon our God-given duties as a church. We must focus on Christ alone so that we will endure to the end and finish the job that He has given us to preach the *Word*, reveal His *wisdom*, and participate in His *work*. When we do, we will achieve even greater things than we can ever imagine through His power and strength.

Key  
Question

What should the focus of the church be?

### Ephesians 3:8-9

#### ***FOCUS ON PREACHING THE WORD:***

Having detailed the function of the ministry to which God had called him in the community, Paul now turns to describe his focus. To understand the focus of the community properly, we must not only know our position and function, but we must also have a proper perspective of ourselves in relation to other people. Therefore, Paul declares that God gave him **this grace** to minister even though he is **less than the least of all the saints** (v. 8). When he recalls his past in persecuting the church and willfully rebelling against the Lord whom he purported to serve ([Acts 9:1-19](#)), he rightly sees himself as unworthy to participate in such a mission to reach the Gentiles with the gospel. Elsewhere, Paul acknowledges, “For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” ([1 Cor 15:9-10](#)).

Paul doesn't have a false sense of humility here when he announces his unworthiness, but he compares himself to the humble obedience of Christ to emphasize the abundance of God's **grace** which has transformed him into someone worthy and useful! Thus, Paul's point is: If God can use him as His messenger to communicate the gospel despite being such a vile and repugnant sinner, then God can use anyone no matter what he or she may have done in the past. We, like Paul, have only become worthy and acceptable to minister in God's glorious name because of His **grace**. Even though we may have different spiritual gifts and serve in various ways through the church, no one is holier, more worthy, or more spiritual to serve than anyone else. When we see ourselves from this perspective, our focus will be on Christ instead of our positions and abilities. Therefore, we must adopt the perspective of John the Baptist who exclaims, “He [Christ] must increase, but I must decrease” ([John 3:30](#)). Our job then becomes to live in such a way that others see Christ in our lives and are pointed to Him rather than seeking glory and honor for what we can do according to our own abilities and power.

Why is it important to have a proper perspective of our role within the church? What can happen if we don't?

Question  
# 1

## Instruct

As a result, we must recognize that God has designed us to work in cooperation rather than isolation; we need each other! No one is more important or more indispensable than anyone else. Some may have more visible and high-profile roles than others in the



community, but that doesn't mean they have more significance and value. On the contrary, our value comes from Christ and not from what we have done in the past, are doing in the present, or will do in the future. Furthermore, Christ equips and empowers us through His **grace** to work according to His purpose to accomplish His will. Consequently, we have nothing

in which we can boast of ourselves nor do we have anything which we must fear; we must learn to rely on Christ and trust the power of His **grace** to work through us as individuals united in His community. Although God's plan will never be thwarted based upon what we do, the church still becomes weakened when some members fail to do their part and allow God to work triumphantly through them. Therefore, let us be united as a community and committed to Christ so that He may accomplish great things through us!

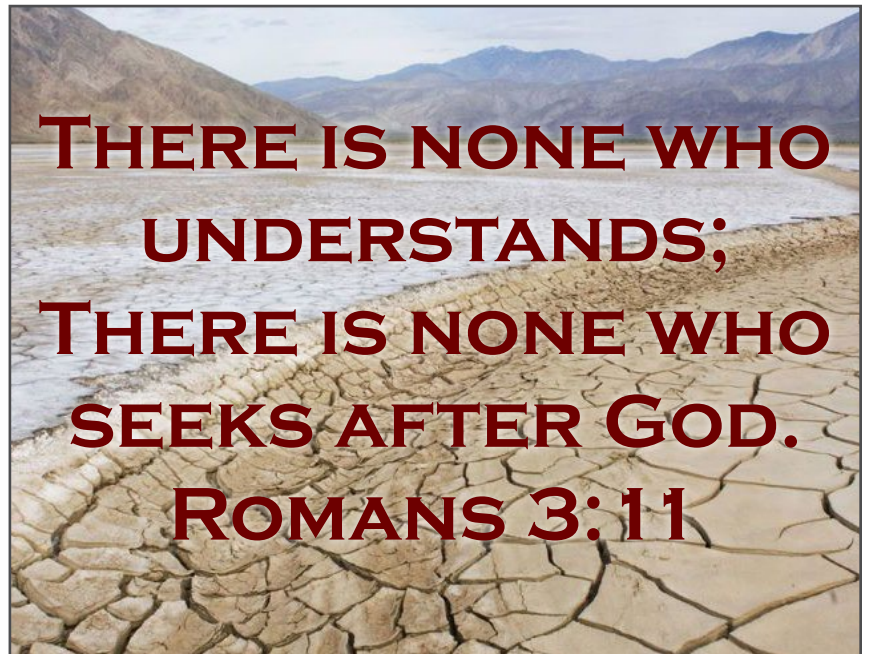
In what ways has God designed the church to cooperate together in ministry?

Question  
# 2

After establishing the preeminence of God's **grace** in giving him the ability to minister, Paul states the objectives of his ministry. Here, he outlines two primary purposes: 1) to **preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ** (v. 8b) and 2) to **make all see the fellowship of the mystery through Christ** (v. 9). As a community, our primary focus is to worship and serve the Lord by proclaiming the gospel. Paul specifically mentions his role in preaching the gospel to the **Gentiles**, but Christ has also charged the church with proclaiming to the entire world—all nations—as He gives us opportunity. Therefore, we must be intentional about preaching the **unsearchable riches of Christ** and have a plan to integrate the gospel into every aspect of ministry



and act of service that we undertake. We need to be on mission every day. Pray for opportunities to share the gospel and be faithful to act when God grants us the chance! The phrase **unsearchable riches** may seem odd to us as a way to refer to the gospel, but it encapsulates the essence of what God has done for us through His **grace**! First, God has plainly revealed or made the gospel known to us through Christ in a way that we can understand. On our own, we don't naturally seek God or desire to have a relationship with Him; instead, we desire to follow our own passions and our own path ([Rom 3:11](#)). Thankfully, however, God sought us and offered reconciliation by coming to us in the flesh and making the gospel of salvation so simple that even a child could understand and receive it. Second, God has freely given of His **riches** by saving us through His **grace**. We can't earn salvation through a merit system or buy it in any other way, but God made His **riches** available to us through His Son who willingly died on our behalf so that we might have life and obtain an inheritance as His children.



In what ways can we incorporate sharing the gospel in our lives every day? Why must we be intentional to do so?

Question  
# 3

In addition, we also ought to help others **see** the value of **the fellowship** produced from the response to the gospel. **From the beginning** of creation, God designed us to have **fellowship** with Him ([1 John 1:5-10](#)) and with other human beings ([Gen 2:18](#); [Psalm 68:6](#)). **Through Jesus Christ**, we can have that **fellowship** restored with Him and with other people whom He has united in the church as one body committed to one purpose. Although a relationship with Christ is a prerequisite for **fellowship** in the church, we will focus primarily on the interaction of members in the community for the sake of space and time in this lesson. As believers, the church should be the central source of our **fellowship**! However, many times we take the church for granted and compartmentalize our lives as to limit the interaction that we have with fellow

## Instruct

believers. As a result, we forget the importance of the church in providing instruction, compassion, support, accountability, and love on behalf of the Lord.

In our world today, people live ever-increasingly isolated lives despite all the advancements in technology. Recently, a TurboTax commercial subtly depicted the



novelty of human interaction in a digital world in which we rarely spend time talking with another human individual. The commercial opens with a tax advisor being lowered from the roof on a platform where he is seated behind a desk with a computer as people stand and applaud mindlessly. Although the commercial touts the benefits of personal attention with

a human being, one of the actors thoughtlessly blurts out, "I think human interaction is overrated, but this makes quite a bit of sense." Even though we may not explicitly say this statement about the church, many people live as though human interaction is overrated in the body of Christ. Many people don't take time to get to know others in the community intimately. Many won't share their burdens because others may gossip or they won't share their joys because others may become jealous. Many people want to hide in the crowd so they can act in any way they want without accountability or loving correction. God didn't design us to function this way or place us in a community to behave in this manner though!

Why do members in the church become increasingly isolated from the body? What can we do as a community to overcome this?

Question  
# 4

However, imagine for a moment someone drowning because he is caught in a rip tide a few yards off the coast. If people linked arms and formed a human chain, they could rescue the person. While some people immediately spring to action, other bystanders just watch. No one had asked them to help and they felt as if they weren't qualified. They thought they better leave it up to the professionals even if it would prove too

late to rescue the man. Still others wanted to wait and see with whom they would link arms because they didn't want to risk getting a weak individual who couldn't support them which would mean that they too could be caught up in the rip tide and washed out to sea. Others didn't want to get involved because they feared what might happen. If something went wrong, they didn't want to be blamed; it's just safer to watch. Unfortunately, many people



in the church behave in this very way. We have a life-changing message about an all-powerful, loving Savior, but we don't participate in proclaiming the gospel. When we focus on preaching the Word, we will function properly as a community led by Christ and we will work together to fulfill the purpose to which He has called us!

God has placed us in a community so we can partner with others and grow together in maturity as we weather the storms of life and seek to fulfill the purpose that He has given us collectively. The word translated **fellowship** comes from the familiar Greek word *koinonia* which can best be translated as partnership; in the church, therefore, we're partners in Christ! Today, we tend to think of **fellowship** in more modern terms of social gatherings, but biblical **fellowship** involves knowing our purpose and mission as a community so that we can strive together to fulfill it. If we have a relationship with Christ, we all have a purpose in the church. God does not lead us to a church merely to attend, but He puts us in a place to serve! To be effective partners, we must trust God to equip and empower us first and foremost, but we must also trust Him to do the same in others and that they will do their part in fulfilling the mission which God has given us. Trust requires that we know God's Word intimately (which we will discuss in the next section), but also that we know each other intimately and hold one another accountable in being an effective partner in ministry. Generally, however, only a fraction of the people attending serve in the community with the rest standing idly on the sidelines. We need to be proactive in sharing the gospel and seeking opportunities to be involved in other areas of ministry. We shouldn't wait for someone to come and ask us, but we should look for where God is active and see how He has gifted us to participate in such an area of service. As a community, we must love each other at all



## Instruct

times, support each other during difficult times, rejoice when we experience victory, encourage each other to remain faithful and obedient to Christ, forgive and correct each other when we err, intercede for each other in prayer, and teach each other according to Scripture—to name a few areas in which we must work together.

What are ways that we should work together as a community?

Question  
# 5

## Ephesians 3:10-12

### **FOCUS ON REVEALING GOD'S WISDOM:**

Not only should we **preach** the Word, but we should also make **known the manifold wisdom of God** (v. 10). In Scripture, God used various men at specific times in history to communicate His divine **wisdom** to us. Over time, He revealed His plan and **eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord** (v. 11). Namely, Jesus blessed all humanity regardless of circumstances or background by paying the penalty for sin with His death on the cross and offering life through His resurrection. Although this **wisdom** from God may sound like foolishness to the world ([1 Cor 1:18](#)), it is the only way that we can have forgiveness for our sins and receive eternal life. In His **wisdom**, God eliminated any work that we could contribute toward salvation because He knew that this would cause division and disunity in the community because people would compete against each other and attempt to show one another up ([1 Cor 1:27-28](#)).

Therefore, we must rely solely upon God's **wisdom**, not human philosophy or understanding, for salvation and as a way to live our lives. When we abide by God's **wisdom** revealed in Christ, **we** can have **boldness and access with confidence through Him in faith** with respect to our salvation (v. 12). This means that when we face eternal judgment that we can declare we have a relationship with Christ who has made us righteous and holy. Therefore, our **confidence** can only be in Christ. For this reason, the author of Hebrews emphatically states, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" ([Heb 4:16](#)). We shouldn't doubt our salvation, but we should live confidently according to the principles God has outlined in His Word so that we might have a successful life in Him. Consequently, a second function of God's **wisdom** is to provide the structure and



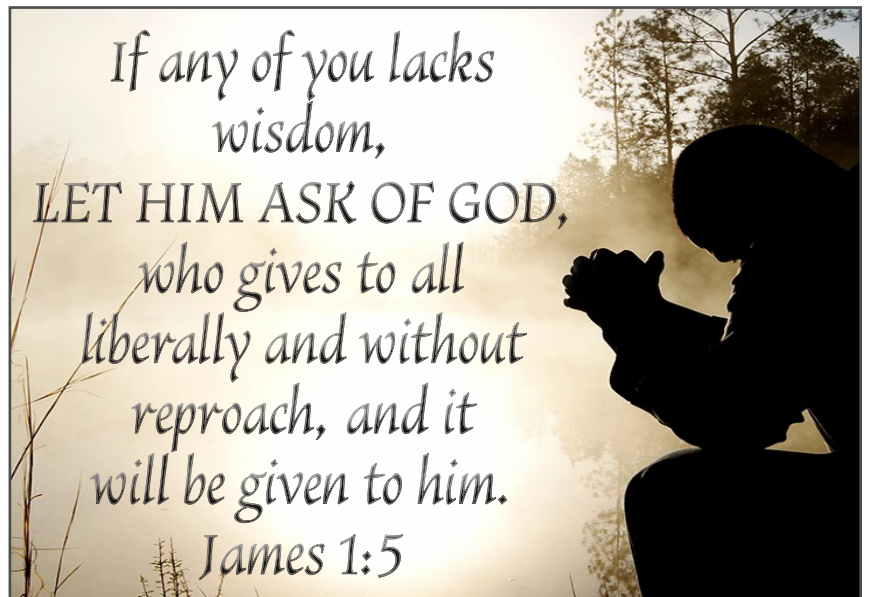
boundaries by which we should live as His children in order that we might have a safe and productive life.

In what ways does salvation in Christ give us confidence?

Question  
# 6

In Scripture, God has clearly given us His **wisdom** by which we should conduct our lives, but He has also shown what happens when we don't follow His **wisdom** and choose to live according to our own philosophies. According to Proverbs 14:12, "There is a way that seems right to man, but its end is the way of death." In contrast, the Bible states that when we follow God's plan and live according to His **wisdom**, we will have life: "Blessed is the man who listens

to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoever finds me finds life, and obtains favor from the Lord" ([Prov 8:34-35](#)). The world often regards God's **wisdom** as legalistic, old-fashioned, and even unfair because they believe that it takes away their fun. On the contrary, God's **wisdom** isn't a bunch of



rules and regulations designed to rob us of our joy and kill our fun; rather, it is the key to happiness and contentment because it protects us, provides for us, and guides us to make the correct choices which lead to an even more abundant life.

As children and teenagers, our parents established rules and boundaries by which we should have lived in order to protect us from harm and help us to mature in our decision-making. Hopefully, we have come to appreciate the value in these boundaries as adults and if God has given us children to raise that we love them enough to give them such wise guidance as well. Our parents didn't set these boundaries because they didn't want us to have fun or they wanted our friends to ridicule and laugh at us. They did it because they loved us and often-times they knew from their own experience the effects that some poor choices could have upon our lives. In the same way, God has outlined His **wisdom** in Scripture for us to follow because He loves us and He wants us to succeed! Because God knows the consequences of our poor choices, He gives us

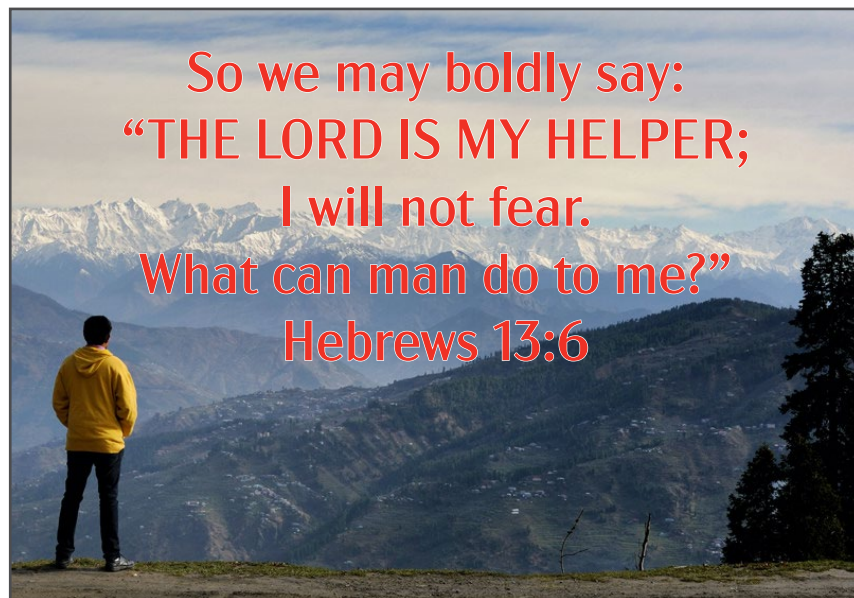
## Instruct

explicit instruction along with examples in His Word. It's important that we learn from these examples and establish a pattern in our lives where we turn to God and surrender to Him completely.

How would you explain to someone that following God's wisdom is not legalistic, but leads to contentment in living a successful life?

Question  
# 7

Above all, when we live according to God's wisdom, we can have **boldness** in two primary ways. First, we can have **boldness** in the way that we live and make decisions. We don't have to fear reprisal or retaliation when we do what's right. Although we may experience persecution for living righteously in Christ, we don't have to worry about the outcome; we will ultimately be victorious in Christ! Second, we can have



**boldness** and not have to stress over making a decision; we won't have to debate about whether something is right or wrong when we live according to God's wisdom and surrender to the guidance of His Spirit. Problems arise, however, when we follow human philosophies because they are fallible and aren't always right because they depend upon man

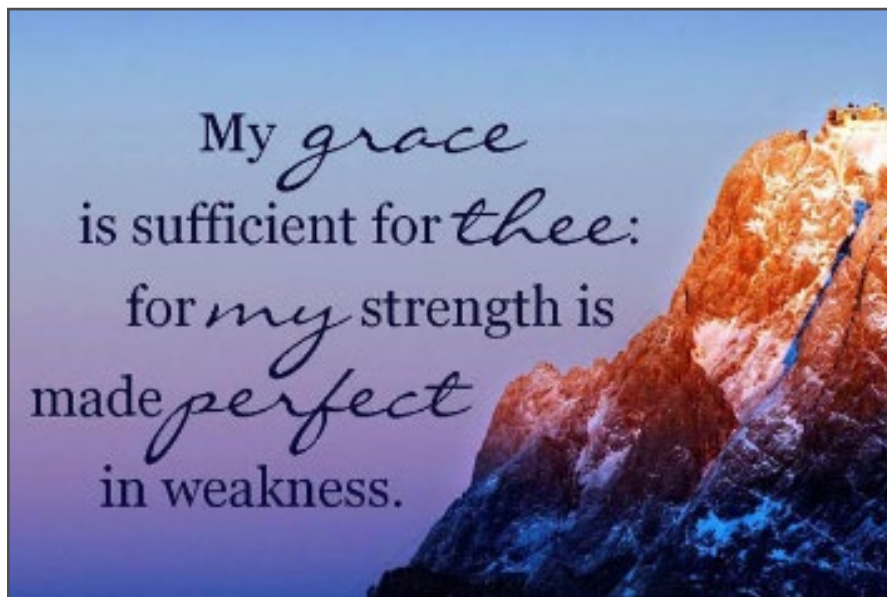
for their validation. With God's wisdom, though, we will never fail and we can have confidence in the choices that we make! As a result, we will also have **boldness** when we preach the gospel, knowing that God has transformed us and is working through us to bring to fruition His divine plan.

## Ephesians 3:13

### **FOCUS ON THE WORK NOT CIRCUMSTANCES:**

As he closes this section, Paul encourages the Ephesians **not to lose heart over his tribulations** (v. 13). Even though he has experienced these trials and sufferings, he has gladly endured them for their sake (i.e. **your glory**) so that they might hear the good news of the gospel and respond. Like the Eskimos who worked on the Alaskan

pipeline which we discussed in the introduction, Paul didn't focus on his circumstances, but focused on the outcome of his ministry in Jesus Christ. Paul could have easily become discouraged and given up when he thought about all the hardships he faced: imprisonments, beatings, stoning, mob violence, shipwrecks, and ridicule. Despite all these hardships, Paul realized that God's grace was sufficient for him ([2 Cor 12:9](#)). Therefore, he continued to spread the gospel faithfully as the Lord had called him—these unfortunate circumstances could not dissuade him or stop him. Moreover, Paul didn't want the Ephesians to feel sorry for him and see him as a victim;



instead, he wanted them to glorify the Lord. As a result, Paul focused on the mission God had given him! Unfortunately, many people today, even some Christians, use their circumstances to elicit pity from others. They go into great detail about their circumstances so that people will feel sorry for them and give them the attention they crave. In a way, they use the bad things that happen to them to their advantage so that people would focus on them and feel sorry for them. Eventually, however, this leads to self-despair and desperation so that people lose focus on what's most important in life. We have something greater in life to which we can look forward. We don't have to despair because the victory has already been won! Therefore, let us focus on Christ who will help us overcome our trials and tribulations. Just as important, let us faithfully complete the work to which He has graciously called us so that others may be pointed to Him and He might receive the glory and honor that He deserves.

In what ways does God use trials to strengthen us and bring honor and glory to Himself?

Question  
# 8

Several months ago as I mowed my lawn, I pressed up on the bridge of my glasses only to have them break in half. I couldn't see anything without them! I did everything to try to repair them so that I could see to drive, but nothing worked—not even duct tape! Because everything was out of focus and I could not see far distances, I had to rely on Bro. Dave Rutherford to drive me to the optometrist. Everything else I needed to do was placed on hold so that I could either get new glasses or have the old ones repaired. I was on a mission because I needed them to finish preparing the curriculum, a sermon for First Worship Tuesdays, and finalize the 2018 Cruise for the Legacy Adults that October. I couldn't let anything else distract me from this mission otherwise it could have had disastrous consequences.

In ministry, we should have such a singular focus to participate in the work to which God has called us. We must not let anything distract us, but rather we must get the job done at all costs. Just as I acted with urgency to repair my glasses, we also ought to act with such urgency to share the gospel because no one is guaranteed tomorrow and their path only leads to destruction without Christ.

Despite the ridicule, rejection, temptation, and torture He experience on our behalf, Christ remained focused on the mission to which the heavenly Father had sent Him to earth so that He could redeem His wayward creation. If Christ endured the cross for our sakes and willingly gave His life for ours, how much more should we be willing to undertake the ministry to which He has called us regardless of what the cost may be? Regardless of what happens in life, therefore, we must not lose focus on Christ and we must work together as a community to encourage and equip each other to do the work of ministry. Therefore, let us remain focused as a community of believers to take the gospel into all the world.



## ***Incorporate***

Why is it important to meet together regularly to study God's Word and seek to understand the wisdom He has revealed to us?

What are some things that could potentially distract us and cause us to lose focus on the ministry to which God has called us?

How often does your Connect Class participate in activities that seek to preach the gospel to the secular world? In what ways can your Connect Class more effectively preach the gospel to the world?

## ***Journal: Document God's Work***

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