

OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

THANKSGIVING

EPHESIANS 1:3-14; COLOSSIANS 3:1-2

OCTOBER 11-17, 2015



MAIN POINT

Remembering all God does for us is how we make Him known and seek His face, two essential parts of our everyday lives.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. Make a list of 10 things you feel thankful for today. Pick one of the items on your list to share with the group, and explain why that made the list.
2. How have you seen God's generosity on display in your life this week? Did you respond with gratitude and thanksgiving? If not, how did you respond?

Leader: Our God is a giving God, and Thanksgiving weekend always reminds us of the importance of reflecting on the generous gifts God has given us. This reflection and gratitude was at the heart of David's words in Psalm 105. This psalm challenges us to reflect on all God does for us because it is how we make Him known to others and how we seek His face. These are two activities that need to be part of our everyday lives.

DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 1:3-14.

3. The Apostle Paul began his letter to the Ephesians by reflecting on and giving thanks to God for many of the spiritual blessings God gives His children through Christ. What were some of the ways Paul told the Ephesians God had blessed them?
4. Which of these blessings from God do you feel particularly thankful for today?
5. How can we demonstrate a sense of gratitude and praise for the blessings described in this section of verses: redeemed, forgiven, enlightened, and made into an inheritance? How will that gratitude and praise look when we meet together as a Growth Group? How will it look when we thank God privately?

Leader: Paul wanted to encourage the Ephesian Christians, so like David in Psalm 105, he encouraged them to reflect on His wonderful acts in and through them. Paul thought specifically about the salvation available through Jesus, which is the greatest gift God has given us. Through faith in Jesus' redemptive work on the cross, our sins have been forgiven and their price has been paid. In redeeming us, God provided us forgiveness, a relationship with Him, and an eternal home in heaven. These blessings are all intended to draw us into a relationship with Jesus.

6. Look again at Ephesians 1:10. What is all of God's creation moving toward? What responsibility do you have to help bring all things under Christ?

7. How does reflecting on God's generous gifts as well as His plan for the future motivate you to make His name known? Can you think of a specific opportunity you have to do that in day-to-day life?

Leader: In verse 10, Paul described how God's plan for creation is to eventually unite everything under Jesus, submitting to Him and bringing Him glory. Because we know the whole story from Scripture, we know this will take place when Jesus returns. In the meantime, it is our responsibility to make His name known around the world. Through this work of the church, people have the opportunity to come to know Jesus and experience the spiritual blessings of God. The fact that God has given us, His church, such a key role to play in His mission should be a source of gratitude and humility in your life.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ COLOSSIANS 3:1-2.

8. Another way we respond to God's work is by seeking Him. From Colossians 3:1-2, what does Paul teach about how we seek God?

9. What are the pitfalls of keeping our minds set on the things of the earth? How does the practice of gratitude help you keep your focus on God?

Leader: Paul encouraged the Colossian believers to make Jesus Christ their priority—to center their lives on Him. The way they do this is by setting their minds on the things of God, or seeking His face. When we focus our attention away from ourselves and onto God, the result is a continual pursuit of His presence. Such focus involves affections, will, and intellect. "Things above" essentially refers to Christ's character traits, whereas "earthly things" refers to worldly goals and values. We seek God's face when we consider Him and base our actions on what He has done and will do for us.

DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

10. In the sermon, Chris talked about how remembering what God has done for us generates gratitude in our hearts. What is one thing you are specifically grateful to God for at this time in your life? How could you use that to make Him known? How can you use it as a reminder and motivation to seek His face?

11. What have you been challenged to take as a next step in being more grateful, and how can our group help?

Leader: Take a few minutes at the close of your group meeting to brainstorm specific ways your Growth Group can make God known around the world and seek Him together. What would this look like immediately, and what might it look like long-term? Also encourage your group to make gratitude and thanksgiving an essential part of their daily prayers.

PRAYER

Thank God for the love He has demonstrated for us through the sacrifice of His Son on the cross. Pray that we would be people who actively remember who God is and what He has done for us. Also pray that our gratitude would motivate us to make His name known and seek His face.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- ☐ Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - **How have you made gratitude and reflection a part of your life this week? Have you remembered to incorporate it into your prayers?**
 - **Have you had the opportunity to make God's name known in another person's life? If not, continue to seek out the chance to do so.**
- ☐ A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- ☐ The challenge to memorize Psalm 105:1-4.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

EPHESIANS 1:3-14

1:3. The verb “blessed” as applied to God points first to His kindness extended to others. Its meaning also includes praises returned to Him by those whom He has blessed. The Heavenly Father is the Source of our every spiritual blessing—and for that matter of our material blessings. Here, however, Paul focused on benefits that exist in the heavens, that is, the supernatural realm invisible to natural sight.

1:4-5. The Old Testament Israelites were often referred to as God’s chosen people. Now, however, it is Christians whom Paul called the chosen people. In the mind of God, before all eternity we existed, and before Christ died for sinners, God chose us to be in Him. This teaching, often called the doctrine of election, is difficult to fully understand. Yet Paul emphasized the result God intends for His chosen ones: to be holy (morally pure, a positive term) and blameless (free from guilt, a negative term). Predestined persons are the same as those God has chosen. The source of God’s saving plan is His favor and will. He was pleased to make this plan, and His determination to accomplish His pleasure cannot be thwarted. The Agent of God’s plan is Jesus Christ, His unique Son, who achieved the plan through His death (1:7). The Father’s plan called for undeserving sinners to be adopted as His sons and daughters, giving His Son a family of siblings.

1:6-8. Paul moved from the benefits we receive through God’s plan of salvation to the benefit God receives: the praise of His glorious grace. When we realize how magnificently God has displayed His grace, we can’t help but praise Him. Our inclusion in God’s gracious plan (He favored us) occurs only in living union with Christ (in the Beloved), God’s Son. Because of His grace, the Father’s love for His Son Jesus has overflowed toward us (“in love,” 1:4). Redemption referred to the payment of a price (ransom) in order to set slaves free. Paul taught that the death of Christ was the price paid to free sinners from their bondage to sin. The basis of redemption is the riches of His grace, God’s limitless mercy. One result of redemption is forgiveness. Punishment is no longer due to we who deserve it, because Another was punished in our place. The term “lavish” means more than enough. God’s rich grace toward undeserving sinners has overflowed like a mighty waterfall. Thus redemption brings to us who receive it the wisdom and understanding we need to live right.

1:9-12. God’s plan is more inclusive than the salvation of individuals. He will bring everything together in the Messiah. Everything will be recognized as submitting to the authority of Jesus Christ. Nothing and no one will escape. Paul was not teaching universalism here, that every person will eventually be saved. Rather, one day every part of the universe will be renewed and brought into subjection to its true Lord. Through redemption and adoption into God’s family, Christians have become His special possession. Paul repeated terms he had already used to stress the settled nature of God’s plan. As we have seen, God’s choice of persons for adoption brings Him praise (1:5). In the same way, His redemption of sinners and making them His inheritance brings praise to His glory.

1:13-14. In addition to all the other spiritual blessings Paul noted, he now mentioned that believers are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. Each believer in Christ receives the indwelling Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9). His presence proves we are truly His children and under His protection. The term “down payment” referred to a portion of a sales price paid in advance to secure someone’s legal claim to an item. The down payment also guaranteed that the rest of the price would be paid. The very Spirit of God in the lives of believers is only the beginning of what we receive in salvation. Paul looked to our future inheritance, the full enjoyment of eternity, when our redemption will be complete. Again the apostle noted the benefit to God from His wonderful plan. Throughout all eternity, salvation will result in the praise of His glory (1:6,12).

COLOSSIANS 3:1-2

Colossians is one of two New Testament books that Paul wrote to churches he did not plant, but it is likely that the gospel first reached Colossae through his missionary efforts in Ephesus. Colossae was receptive to the gospel but the believers there soon came under the influence of a spreading heresy known as Gnosticism, which at that time was in incipient form. Paul wrote Colossians when imprisoned in Rome about A.D. 60–62.

Colossians 3:1-4 forms the climax of Paul's argument begun at 1:3 on the preeminence of Christ for Christian doctrine. Paul often spoke of our unity with Christ as an indispensable truth for believers to grasp in relation to Christian living. Believers "have been raised with the Messiah," indicating that in a spiritual sense His resurrection provided them with resurrection power (see Phil. 3:10-11).

In Romans 6:3-11 Paul made the same point about the power of our unity with Christ in His death (see Gal. 2:20), and he also connected that unity to Jesus' resurrection. In light of our unity with Christ's resurrection, we must focus on eternal matters. Christ's resurrection and exaltation make it inappropriate at best and sinful at worst for His followers to ignore matters of lasting value and spiritual significance. If our eyes are on Christ, then we will want to focus on the things above that bring glory to Him and enhance our relationship with Him. Believers must choose daily to focus on the things of God. Both Bible memorization and prayer will help believers in this area. Those who claim to know Christ but consistently fail to think about Him during the day may need to reexamine their relationship with Him.

Paul expanded on the need to focus on Christ and spiritual things in verse 2. The words "set your minds" indicate focused attention, and once again the focus is on spiritual things (what is above), not on fleeting and transitory things (what is on the earth). Scripture teaches that there are very few things that last, that have eternal value and existence. The world is not one of them. So it is both consistent and appropriate that those of us who are fit for eternity—those whom God has redeemed through His Son and who will live forever with Him—will focus on those things that are inherent in who we are.