Rejoice
God chose to provide the blessings of salvation through Jesus’ sacrifice.

EPHESIANS 1:3-14
MEMORY VERSE: EPHESIANS 1:7

READ Ephesians 1:1-14, First Thoughts (p. 14), and Understand the Context (p. 14). As you read the Scripture passage, note each occurrence of the phrase “in Christ.” Consider how that phrase is significant to you.

STUDY Ephesians 1:3-14, using Explore the Text (pp. 15–19). As you read the Scripture passage, note any words related to praising God or rejoicing. In the margin of your leader guide, write the reasons Paul gave for rejoicing.

PLAN the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 20–21), More Ideas (p. 22), and Weekly Adult Extras under the Resources tab at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible. Add variety to your plans for your group in this session by using at least one idea from More Ideas.

GAIN insights from the weekly podcast on Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/ExploreTheBible).

GATHER the following items: □ Personal Study Guides; □ Trophies, ribbons, certificates, and other awards of achievement; □ A large sheet of paper and markers or a dry-erase board or chalkboard, and for More Ideas (p. 22): □ A document with a legal seal or stamp, such as a passport. Prepare to display the following Pack Items: □ PACK ITEM 1 (Map: Paul’s Second and Third Journeys); and □ PACK ITEM 3 (Poster: The City of Ephesus). Make copies of: □ PACK ITEM 8 (Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark).
FIRST THOUGHTS

People who have a goal for their lives and follow a clear plan for accomplishing that goal fascinate us. Everything they do appears to be tied to that goal. We admire their determination and focus. At the same time, we forget that God has a goal or purpose for His creation, and He is focused on that goal. God does not work randomly but is moving His creation to fulfill His purposes. Paul explained that believers are the benefactors of God’s purposes, as He chose to bring us salvation through His Son.

(In PSG, p. 10) How would you describe the purpose of creation? How do you see history moving to accomplish that purpose?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EPHESIANS 1:1-14

The opening verses of Ephesians set the stage for the remainder of the letter. Paul referred to himself as the writer in two places (Eph. 1:1; 3:1). In the first verse he referred to himself as “an apostle of Christ Jesus by God’s will.” In the second reference he called himself “the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles.” As an apostle to both Jews and Gentiles, Paul wrote this letter to all the “faithful saints in Christ Jesus at Ephesus.”

The city of Ephesus was originally a Greek colony, but by Paul’s day it had become the capital of the Roman province of Asia. Located in present-day Turkey, it was positioned at the center of several major trade routes throughout the Roman Empire. It had a harbor that opened into the Cayster River and emptied into the Aegean Sea. However, Ephesus was more than a cultural center; it served as the headquarters of the cult dedicated to the goddess Artemis (or Diana). The temple to Artemis had become one of the Seven Wonders of the World, and Paul’s preaching of the gospel had threatened this powerful cult. (See Acts 19:23-41.)

Paul had brought the gospel to Ephesus. Initially, he found some who were followers of John the Baptist and led them to faith in Jesus (Acts 19:1-5). He entered the synagogue there and preached Jesus. For two years he remained in Ephesus preaching the gospel (19:8-10). He opposed the demonic and did signs and wonders in Ephesus without much repercussion (19:11-20). When he opposed the idolatry of the Artemis cult, he began to experience significant opposition (19:21-27). A riot took place in the city, and Paul left Ephesus (19:28-41). He then corresponded with the church by letter, which we have in the Letter to the Ephesians.

Paul wrote this letter to keep the gospel in the minds of those who lived in such a religiously plural environment. He probably intended it to be read

KEY DOCTRINE

God’s Purpose in Grace

Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end (2 Thess. 2:13-14).

BIBLE SKILL

Reflect on a repeated word or phrase.

Three times in Ephesians 1:3-14 Paul pointed to the praise of God’s glory (Eph. 1:6,12,14). Review each instance, looking for similarities and differences in how the phrase is used. What does this phrase reveal about the purpose of our salvation? How does knowing that purpose change our perspective on salvation? How does your salvation give you a means to rejoice over God’s gracious glory?

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in other churches as well. Paul wrote to a city and a region that had many gods, and few thought of any of them as exclusive. People could worship multiple deities without threatening their commitment to other deities. However, this was not true of Judaism, and it certainly was not true of the gospel message that Paul brought about Jesus Christ.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

CHosen (EPH. 1:3-6)

Paul began his letter to the Ephesians by rejoicing in God’s provision for His people. Referring to the triune God, he reminded his readers that they were chosen by God (1:3-6), redeemed by Jesus (1:7-12), and sealed by the Holy Spirit (1:13-14). This whole section, Ephesians 1:3-14, is made up of one long and complex sentence in Greek.

VERSE 3

The section begins with a reference to God as blessed. Because God is blessed, we are the beneficiaries of many of His blessings, several of which Paul named. In fact, Paul described the believer as having every spiritual blessing in the heavens. This is one of five occasions in Ephesians where he referred to the heavens. (See also 1:20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12.) It is a reference to the realm of spiritual blessings rather than a geographic location of the blessings. These are blessings brought to us in Christ. That phrase, in Christ, referred to the union between God and man that was secured through a relationship with Christ. It was a favorite expression of Paul’s for salvation. Before Paul listed the blessings given by God, he located those blessings in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

VERSes 4-6

Paul indicated that God chose us in him, before the foundation of the world. Paul affirmed the fact that God had chosen believers as He had chosen the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. The same Greek word in the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) is used to refer to the choosing of Israel. Indeed, the Old Testament speaks of God having chosen Abraham (Neh. 9:7), Aaron (Ps. 105:26), David (1 Kings 11:34; Ps. 78:70), Eli’s father (1 Sam. 2:28), and Jacob (Isa. 41:8). This was language used of Jesus as well in Luke 9:35, “Then a voice came from the cloud, saying: ‘This is my Son, the Chosen One; listen to him!’”

God had begun to make provision for sin before man had even sinned.

God’s election is not a matter of boasting or pride. God chose the weak to confound the wise (1 Cor. 1:27-28). He chose us before the foundation of the world. God had begun to make provision for sin before man had even

VERSES 3-6

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens. This is one of five occasions in Ephesians where he referred to the heavens. (See also 1:20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12.) It is a reference to the realm of spiritual blessings rather than a geographic location of the blessings. These are blessings brought to us in Christ. That phrase, in Christ, referred to the union between God and man that was secured through a relationship with Christ. It was a favorite expression of Paul’s for salvation. Before Paul listed the blessings given by God, he located those blessings in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

sinned. He took the initiative in reaching down to sinful humanity, and if He had not done so, nobody would be saved. This doesn’t preclude the necessity of faith. Tony Merida stated, “Election and faith belong in the same sentence, and it is a sentence only God could write.”

God’s purpose in election was that we might be **holy and blameless in love before him.** Salvation in its broadest sense does not refer only to what happens after death but to the transformation wrought in a person’s heart as he or she meets Christ. To be **blameless** is to be free from blemish. This is used of Jesus (Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:19), the church (Eph. 5:27), and Christians (2 Pet. 3:14; Jude 24).

Using the language of election, Paul explained that God **predestined** us. This word meant “to mark out beforehand.” The language of predestination is used in the Bible six times. (See Acts 4:28; Rom. 8:29,30; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:5,11.) Believers are predestined to be **adopted as sons through Jesus Christ.** Election was with a view to adoption. Adoption carried with it all the privileges of a natural-born child. Through God’s purposeful love, He took us and adopted us into His own family, declaring we are His own children with all the rights of a natural heir.

The adoption is not based on the qualities of the child being adopted but purely on the **good pleasure** of God’s will. God desired to be kind to us when we were still sinners (Rom. 5:8). This was a source of great rejoicing by Paul as he recounted the blessings of God.

The only proper response to God’s choosing and adopting us is not arrogance or pride but **the praise of his glorious grace.** Like an orphaned child without hope in the world, God went to the orphanage, chose us, and adopted us into His family. This was not based on the merit of the saved but on the graciousness of God. He **lavished** His grace upon us by sending His **Beloved One,** Jesus Christ.

**The Ephesians lived in a place where people chose their gods. Paul spoke of a God who chose them.**

Can you imagine this message in the culture of Ephesus? The Ephesians lived in a place where people chose their gods. Paul spoke of a God who chose them. People of Ephesus were not asking whether they should worship, but rather, they were asking which god they should worship. Paul answered the question by demonstrating God’s action of sending Jesus Christ.

**Why is it important to remember that election in this passage is a prelude to worship rather than a doctrine to be debated?**
VERSES 7-8

Redemption was the term used for the payment for a slave’s freedom. This payment was made according to the riches of God’s grace. It was neither deserved nor earned. Redemption came through the blood of Jesus. His blood paid the penalty of the sin debt that gripped sinners. Since all people are sinners (Rom. 3:23), all are enslaved to its effects. But through Christ, redemption is linked with three important concepts.

First, redemption is further described as the forgiveness of our trespasses. A trespass is any deviation from the right path. The need of those who have crossed God’s boundaries is forgiveness, a term that meant to loosen something from whatever binds it. Sin bound humanity, but through the blood of Jesus people can be set free from its enslavement. Second, redemption is connected to God’s grace. It is not earned but freely given. Third, redemption was given with all wisdom and understanding. God not only gave salvation, He also gave the ability to know how to live in light of it.

VERSES 9-10

God’s plan went beyond the salvation of individual sinners. His ultimate desire was to bring everything together in Christ. History is headed in a direction. God’s desire is that both things in heaven and things on earth all come together in Christ. Jesus had taught His disciples to pray, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10-11). A quick glimpse at the world today reveals this prayer has not been fully answered. Sin is rampant. Hatred and war rule over the kingdom of this world. But a day is coming when everything will come together in Christ.

The word plan was used for the administration of a household. As a manager took stewardship over the household, God has taken stewardship over His creation. This plan was unfolded by the mystery of his will. The word mystery is used throughout Ephesians (3:3,9; 5:32; 6:19), but it does not mean the same thing as what we often think. To us, a mystery is something that is unknown or unsolved. In Paul’s use of the word, a mystery was a truth once hidden but now revealed. God has always had a careful plan to redeem that which was affected by the fall, but He waited until the proper time to reveal that plan.

VERSES 11-12

Because we have been adopted into God’s family, we also receive an inheritance. Natural born heirs and adopted heirs receive the same inheritance. In addition to forgiveness (1:7) and insight (1:9), those adopted in God’s kingdom receive an inheritance that is worthy of praise to the Father. Israel had been regarded as the Lord’s inheritance and portion, and now the church as the new Israel enters into that same privilege (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 3:29; Col. 1:12). Individual believers enter into that same arrangement.

Paul reminded the Ephesians that this was because of the purpose of God’s will rather than their own effort or work. God graciously sent His Son
to the world to pay for sin and effect redemption, and this led to the adoption and inheritance of many. Again, keep in mind the context. Paul was rejoicing with the Ephesians in the salvation God graciously provided for them.

Those who had already put our hope in Christ was a reference to the Jews. They were the ones who carried the hope of a future coming of the Messiah. The Gentiles carried no such hope (Eph. 2:12). This further highlights praise to his glory. God is such a glorious God that He has provided adoption for all those who would come to faith in Him through Jesus.

God chose the Jews to be a light to the Gentiles (Isa. 49:6). He did not choose them because they were good but because they were weak. Through them, He would display His salvation to all the nations. What was true of the Jews is true of individuals as well. God’s election was not to produce a superior race of people, but to display His saving power to the world. Evangelism was always on the heart of God.

How does the doctrine of election encourage rather than discourage evangelism?

SEALED (EPH. 1:13-14)

VERSE 13

13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

In Christ, believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit. A seal was a mark of ownership in the ancient world. All of a person’s significant possessions were marked with the impression of the seal. This could have included letters, which had the wax imprint of an owner’s seal, or it could have been attached to goods being transported to indicate ownership and secure protection while in route. Though salvation begins at the moment a person believes, it is not completed in its entirety until after death or the return of Christ. The seal of the Holy Spirit signifies God’s ownership and protection to complete what He has started in the life of the believer. (See Phil. 1:6.)
Having referred to the Holy Spirit as a seal, Paul also called Him the *down payment of our inheritance*. This was a term related to business or commerce. It could be translated as “down payment,” “deposit,” or “earnest money.” This was an initial payment to make sure the full payment would be made at a later date. The reference to the Spirit as both a *seal* and a *down payment* was used by Paul in writing to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 1:21-22). He again used the term *down payment* to demonstrate that though the Spirit is given at conversion, His complete work of transformation in us is not completed until later (2 Cor. 5:5). Romans 8:23 describes the receiving of the Spirit as the firstfruits of what God will do in our lives. We receive the Spirit at salvation, and then the Spirit begins to work to make us like Christ. However, the receiving of the Spirit is the down payment guaranteeing that God will finish what He started in us.

The receiving of the Spirit is the down payment guaranteeing that God will finish what He started in us.

The Holy Spirit remains the down payment until the *redemption of the possession* is complete. Though believers have received the forgiveness of trespasses (Eph. 1:7) and the seal of the Holy Spirit (1:13), they are still a work in progress. So, is there any hope that their salvation is secure? That hope comes from everything Paul mentioned in this passage. The Father chose them. The Son redeemed them. The Holy Spirit sealed them. All of these were acts of God's gracious character. If salvation is not a work of man, then neither is keeping salvation a work of man. As the seal and the down payment, the Holy Spirit guarantees the salvation of all believers, giving them confidence that God will finish what He started in them. Again, this fact magnifies God's *glory*. In a culture where people could choose whatever god they wanted and as many as they wanted, Paul highlighted reasons to rejoice. God had chosen them, and Jesus had redeemed them. And now the Holy Spirit had put His seal upon them, pledging to hold them and keep them until the redemption project was complete. The Ephesians had experienced many blessings of God in salvation, and they had reason to rejoice.

How does the gospel of grace give assurance to the believer? Why does a works-based salvation lead to uncertainty?

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LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

GUIDE: Display a number of different trophies, ribbons, and certificates of achievement. Lead group members to discuss awards or recognitions they have received. Which award or achievement meant the most? Ask: What was the selection criteria for the award? Explain: There are some awards we work very hard for, and we feel either proud of the accomplishment if we win or discouraged if we lose. Then there are those recognitions we weren’t expecting, and we often feel humbled and grateful to be recognized in such a way.

ASK: When we think about being chosen by God, do we tend to view it as an award we work hard for or a recognition we are humbled by?

TRANSITION: In Ephesians 1, we learn we have been chosen for an unbelievable honor—to be in Christ! Being chosen drives us to focus not on the skills of the recipients but on the generosity of the Giver.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

HIGHLIGHT: Point to Pack Item 3 (Poster: The City of Ephesus) and explain from Understand the Context (PSG, p. 11) that Ephesus was a large, influential city in Paul’s day. Identify the location of Ephesus on Pack Item 1 (Map: Paul’s Second and Third Journeys). Suggest that the residents of Ephesus must have felt very proud and privileged to live in such an important city. But just as none of us gets to choose where we’re born, there probably wasn’t anyone in Paul’s audience who could take credit for the importance of the city.

READ: Direct a volunteer to read Ephesians 1:3-6. Encourage the group to listen for phrases describing God’s initiative.

ASK: Did you hear anything in verses 3-6 that suggest anything we did to deserve being chosen? If not, then what was God’s motivation, according to verse 4?

STATE: What human beings call “love” is often very conditional. You’ve probably experienced relationships where you felt like the other person was saying “I love you ‘if’...” or “I love you ‘because’...” But when Paul says that God chose us “in love,” there were no conditions attached.

DISCUSS: Invite anyone who has gone through or been close to the adoption process to share his or her experience. Ask: In what ways is adoption an even stronger illustration of God’s relationship with us than biological childbirth?

ASK: How should God’s choosing us impact our view of life? How should His choice to offer salvation impact our attitude toward God? In what way should you live differently because of it? (PSG, p. 14)

TRANSITION: A family can choose to adopt a newborn baby and see that baby as innocent, unspoiled, and morally neutral. But what if you aren’t adopting a newborn, but instead an older child who has some baggage in his background? Here’s where we start to see the difference between being “chosen” and being “redeemed.”

READ: Invite someone to read aloud Ephesians 1:7-12. Guide the group to listen for God’s purposes to our redemption.
ASK: Why did God go to the trouble of redeeming us? Point to verses 10 and 12.

DIRECT: Ask for two volunteers to read Leviticus 25:25-27 and Leviticus 25:47-49. Explain that in the Year of Jubilee, provision was made for restoring land to its original owner if it had been sold to someone else. This is where our concept for redemption originates.

ASK: In this illustration, human beings are like the valuable land that’s being restored to its original owner. How does this idea help us understand our salvation?

EMPHASIZE: Point out that Ephesians 1:7 is the memory verse for the week. Distribute copies of Pack Item 8 (Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark). Note that the group can use this as a tool for tracking the verses they memorize throughout the study.

ASK: How are redemption and forgiveness related? How does the truth that Jesus is the only way to gain redemption serve as motivation to share the gospel with others? (PSG, p. 15)

SUMMARIZE: Point out that when Paul used the word “mystery” in verse 9, he didn’t mean that God’s will is a secret to be uncovered or a puzzle to be solved. Instead, Paul described God’s will as a “mystery” because it can only be understood by revelation from God Himself. (Explain that we will get into this concept in even more detail in Session 5 of this study.)

TRANSITION: Typically, when something valuable changes hands, a legal document bearing the seal of a notary establishes ownership. In the final section of verses, we’re going to see how God has established proof of ownership over our lives.

READ: Direct a volunteer to read Ephesians 1:13-14. While he or she is reading, write the words Sealed, Heard, and Believed on the board. Lead the group to identify the proper order for these three steps, according to verses 13-14.

SUMMARIZE: Use the information on page 18 of this leader guide about the purpose of the seal to discuss what Paul meant by our being sealed with the Holy Spirit.

ASK: How does the sealing of the Holy Spirit give a believer confidence to fulfill God’s purposes? (PSG, p. 17)

DISCUSS: When we make a down payment on a major purchase, we get to experience the benefits of the purchase, even though it isn’t fully ours yet. We still get to live in the house or drive the car, despite the fact that we have only made an initial payment. This is similar to what Paul meant when he said the Holy Spirit is a down payment of our inheritance.

ASK: How does the gospel of grace build assurance into the life of the believer? (PSG, p. 17)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

REVIEW: Invite volunteers to read the bulleted statements under In My Context (PSG, p. 18). Then ask: How can we express humility and confidence at the same time?

CHALLENGE: Call attention to the third set of questions under In My Context (PSG, p. 18): List ways to offer praise this week to God for His salvation. Include both private and public means of offering praise including service to others. What action will you take this week as an act of praise for God choosing to provide Jesus for our salvation?

PRAY: Lead in a time of sharing prayers of praise, as well as any prayer requests.
PRACTICE

• Identify group members whose attendance may have dropped recently. Encourage them this week, emphasizing that the start of a new unit of study is a great time to get back into the habit of participating in group life.

• Organize a group outing to see the movie Overcomer. Encourage the group to look for themes found in Ephesians that are presented in the movie.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To replace the focus idea on page 20, form small teams of no more than five. Explain to them that they are the selection committee who will determine the criteria of a certain award, which they will draw from a hat. Here are the categories: sports play of the week; most important news story of the month; movie of the year; outstanding leader in your community or church. After allowing the group to work, invite a representative to share the criteria they agreed upon. The point of this is not to debate the award itself, but to get them to consider their selection criteria.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

• For further examination of Ephesians 1:3-6, lead the group to complete the Bible Skill activity on page 12 of the PSG.

• To supplement the discussion of Ephesians 1:5, invite a group member or special guest to share his or her adoption story. Or consider asking someone who was adopted to share with the group how it felt to be chosen.

• To enhance your understanding of Ephesians 1:13, bring your diploma, passport, or any other document with a legal seal or stamp. Discuss how the seal legitimizes your ownership, or achievement, or legal rights. Read Philippians 3:12-13, pointing out that we continue to pursue the goal with the confidence that one day we will fully own all the blessings of our inheritance.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Guide the group to journal about a time in their lives when they have experienced God’s glory, whether in the birth of a child, seeing God’s creation, or so on. Challenge group members to think of their own salvation as even more glorious than the most awesome work of God’s creation they’ve ever seen.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

To close the session, play the song “Adopted,” by Jimmy McNeal. Lead group members to listen to the song while they focus on the message of Ephesians 1:3-7.