

Getting Acquainted

Well, good morning guys, good to see you. If you have your bibles, turn with me to **Ephesians 1**. Today we are kicking off a new summer-long series in the letter to the Ephesians (also known as the book of Ephesians). This series will actually be our longest series yet, taking us all the way through September, 17 weeks in all. And knowing that we're gonna be studying one book of the bible for that long might make your eyes glaze over just thinking about, or might make you really excited, depending on your level of bible nerd-dom. But as you may have noticed from the Scripture reading this morning, we're not gonna get all that far today. Two verses in, to be exact. But that's because **today, I want us to just spend some time just getting acquainted with the book of Ephesians, and understanding the context of the book.** Getting a framework for what it is exactly that we're reading. And I want us to do that because **I think understanding context is really important to most anything you read or hear.**

Let me try and illustrate why I believe that. If you took our bible class back in February, you will have already heard this **illustration**, but imagine that tomorrow morning, you're sitting at one of our many wonderful local coffee shops here in Knoxville. You've just picked up your double-shot non-fat Lavender latte with a sprinkle of cinnamon. And you're doing what everyone does at coffee shops, which is pretending to do something important while eavesdropping on other people's conversations. And there are two middle-aged women sitting nearby having a conversation. And once you sit down at your table, you hear one of them say "I'm going to kill him. I just *know* I'm going to kill him." And you think to yourself, *I just hit the eavesdropping jackpot.* Now, what you just heard could have a multitude of different meanings. On the one hand, you could have just unwittingly become the accomplice to a murder. Maybe she's had it with her husband or boyfriend and she has decided that this public coffee shop is the perfect place to plan the crime. That's possible. Or, maybe she just hung out with her younger brother, who loves to get under her skin all the time, and she's playfully saying "I'm gonna kill him." That's also possible. Or, it might not be about a person at all. Maybe she's recently gotten a new pet dog, and she's forgotten to feed him three days this week, and she's anxiously saying "I'm going to kill him. I just know I'm going to forget to feed him and he's gonna die." Those are all possible scenarios, and there are probably at least a dozen more. And **which one it is, and what you should do about it, depends almost entirely on the context of what you just heard.** The only way to know whether this woman is a murderer, or an anxious pet owner, or anything else, is to take the time to get acquainted with her and her context. **And until you do that and know the context, you don't really have any accurate read on what you should do with that information.**

I tell you that story because **a lot of people try to understand what to do with the bible without spending much time at all understanding its context.** When I was in college, I remember attending a **lecture** where at one point, this visiting professor went on a rant about the "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" law in the bible. He just went on this 10 minute tirade about how cruel and barbaric that law is, that God would compel someone to dismember another person in retaliation for a crime. At one point he said "this is why we can't possibly take the bible seriously in a modern society! Because it commands things like this." Well, little did he know that that verse isn't actually advocating for reciprocation. It's actually trying to *limit* retaliation. In other words, the bible isn't saying "if someone pokes out your eye, you must go pluck out their eye in return." It's saying "if a person injures your eye, you can't do anything *more* than injuring their eye." The law is actually trying to prevent against escalation and over-retaliation for crimes. It's actually trying to *prevent* the very thing he thought it was *advocating*. And if he would've took the time

to understand the *context* of that passage, he would've known that. **It's very hard to understand what the bible is saying and what to do with it without understanding the context in which its written.** So today, I want us to spend some time getting acquainted with the *context* of this letter to the Ephesians.

The Author

So let's start off by talking a bit about **who wrote this** particular letter. The beginning of our passage reads simply "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God." In the ancient world, you signed your letters at the beginning instead of the end. That way, people knew who it was saying all the things they were about to read. And this letter is written by a guy named Paul. Now, I'm aware that a movie recently came out about Paul. I haven't seen it, simply because it is a movie made specifically for Christians and generally those movies tend to not be the highest quality of movies. So in the off-chance that you *haven't* seen that movie (which I'm guessing is the case for pretty much all of us), let me tell you briefly about who Paul was.

We'll cover his story in far more detail in a few weeks, but long-story-short, **Paul was originally an enemy of the early Church, who eventually became one of its greatest assets.** Once he became a follower of Jesus, Paul spent the rest of his life starting and helping churches full of Jesus-followers all over the ancient world. **The most conservative estimates say that Paul started around 14 churches over his lifetime.** Now to me, as a guy who's currently starting just *one* church, that's impressive to me. Because you guys are great and I love what I do, but starting a church is a lot of work. It's not for the faint of heart. And I don't know if I'm gonna make it to 14 of them by the time I'm done. Starting a church takes a lot of time, energy, effort—it's not for the faint of heart. And Paul did that *at least fourteen times* in his life. That's next-level in my opinion. And then if you count all the other churches that were started *out of* the churches *he* started, the number gets exponentially larger. So Paul started churches. That's **part of what the word "apostle" means—it means someone who is sent—and specifically in Paul's case, sent to start churches, and organize churches around existing followers of Jesus in different places.** And one of the churches he started was in a city called Ephesus.

The Audience

So next let's talk a little about that city and the audience Paul is writing to in that city. Our passage reads "*...to the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus.*" That's who Paul is writing this to—the people in one of the churches he started, in the city of Ephesus. Now the church in Ephesus has quite the **origin story.** We read in Acts 19 that when Paul came to the city, he started telling people about Jesus, and **tons of them started following Jesus. So many of them in fact, that it disrupted the very economy of the city.** A lot of people in Ephesus made their money by making these little statues of a Greek goddess by the name of Artemis. And so many people in the city start following Jesus that the silversmiths start losing money, because nobody wants to buy these statues they're making anymore. So they start a riot in the middle of the city. Let that sink in—**the very economy of the city is disrupted because so many people begin following Jesus.**

Now the tendency I think, for us today, is to hear that and go "that's really cool, but it wouldn't ever have to be like that today." Like, people in Knoxville aren't buying little statues of false gods in bulk that I know

of, and so it would never go down like that. But I wouldn't be so quick to believe that. Because the reality is that **the gospel, by its very nature, is disruptive**. **There is no way to live out the things that the bible claims without it disrupting both your life individually, and the systems at work in our world.** For example, Jesus claims that the point of life is to quote "deny yourself, pick up your cross, and follow him." Do you realize how necessarily disruptive that is to believing "do whatever makes you happy and follow your dreams"? Jesus claims that "anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has committed adultery with her in his heart." Do you realize how necessarily disruptive that is to industries of porn, film, and advertising that literally earn their money by offering people opportunities to "look at women lustfully?" **The way of Jesus is necessarily disruptive.** When followers of Jesus live their lives in light of the things in this book, it absolutely brings disruption. **And if it hasn't disrupted your life individually in some way, I think it's worth asking if you've encountered the real thing or not.** Because disruption in many ways, is a necessary result of living the way of Jesus and the message it proclaims.

The Message

And that leads us to the *message* of the letter, it's content. **What exactly is Paul trying to say in the book of Ephesians? What is the point he's trying to get across?** Well, I think there are plenty of good ways to summarize it, but in my opinion the best way is found in chapter 1, verse 10. **I think this verse is not only a good summary of what Paul is saying in Ephesians, but even a good summary of what God is up to in the world in general.** Paul is going into the incredible detail of everything that God has done for us in Jesus, and then here's what it says that God's ultimate purpose in all of it is:

...to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

"To unite all things in Jesus, things in heaven and things on earth." That's what Paul says is the end goal is of everything God is doing, and I would argue it's also a summary of everything that the letter to the Ephesians describes. To unite all things. This verse is where we got the subtitle to our series, "How God Puts Things Back Together." That's just our little paraphrase of v. 10: **God's plan is to put things back together. And the book of Ephesians details how exactly he's doing that.**

Now, if you're paying attention when I say that, you might be thinking **"but didn't you just say** that following Jesus is necessarily **disruptive?** How can something be disruptive *and* unifying? **And that's one of the great dichotomies of the way of Jesus: that even as it disrupts the way things are, it actually returns things to the way they were always meant to be. It disrupts the status quo—but it also restores their intended design.**

Because by saying that God is "putting things back together," we are implying what? That things currently aren't that way. It implies that there are things on planet earth that are currently *not* the way they are supposed to be and *need* to be put back together. Now, I don't think that statement requires much convincing, but just briefly, here's just a sampling of what I mean:

- Our last **political cycle** in the U.S. revealed that we more divided politically than ever, but it also revealed that a lot of America apparently has no idea how to talk rationally to people they disagree with. In fact, what we discovered is that apparently during the last election the air is so flammable with division that all Russian operatives had to do is create a fake Facebook account, make an incendiary comment, and then sit back and watch as things explode. What does that say

about how divided and fractured our society is? The way we talk to each other is broken and needs to be put back together.

- As another example, while we would love to believe that **racial tension** in our country has come a long way since our founding, it has become apparent to most of us in recent years that we still have a massive chasm to bridge specifically black and white people in our country, among others. Race in our country is broken and needs to be put back together.
- The **#MeToo** movement literally rages on, revealing a that 1) that we have a horrific history of sexual violence in our country, 2) that it has been suppressed and silenced for far too long and in far too many ways. The way a *lot* of people exhibit and express sexual desire in our country is broken and needs to be put back together.
- And even in a general sense, more **marriages and families** than ever are broken and fractured—ripped apart by divorce, desertion, or simply constant conflict. The way we do marriage and family is broken and needs to be put back together.

The reality of our world is that things are currently *not as they should be*. And all of that is just in America. We haven't even touched the disorder and brokenness going on in other parts of the world. The evidence could go on for miles, but what's clear is that **things in our world, as they stand, need to be put back together.** In fact, for many of us, the brokenness we see on a regular basis seems so constant that the promise, of God putting things back together sounds almost like nonsense. It feels so radically different than our current realities that it almost sounds like fantasy to us. But it's not. And Paul is going to try to unpack for us in this book specifically *how* it's not.

So in this book, what Paul is trying to do is describe the problem with our current human predicament, what exactly God is doing about it, and how we join him in that. He's going to give us instruction on how we should talk to one another in a way that leads to unity and not division. He's going to give us the basis on which to build unity and understanding along racial lines and with those different than us. He's going to give us an alternative way of thinking about sex that counteracts and prevents sexual abuse and sexual brokenness. He's going to give us a foundation for understanding marriage and family that restores and breathes life into those relationships. And in doing all that, **Paul is showing us how exactly God is putting things back together and how we join him in that process.**

And so part of **why we want** to spend so much time this summer working our way through this book, is that we want to *become* that type of community. We want to be who the Church is called to be in this letter. We want to grow in our understanding of how God is putting things back together and what our role is in that. **And what we have in this letter to the Ephesians is six chapters, 155 verses of Paul explaining how that works. We're studying it because we want to be a part of that story.**

Now as you might expect, unpacking such a topic has to be **extensive**. And Ephesians is exactly that. For such a relatively small book in the bible, Ephesians covers a **wide range of topics**. Before we finish, we will hear Paul discuss the trinity, sex, salvation, racial reconciliation, alcohol, wisdom, anger, prayer, parenting, spiritual warfare, slavery, spiritual giftings, marriage, singing—just to name a few. **By the time we're done studying this book, we will have explored a multitude of different topics to discover how all of them play a role in God putting things back together.**

The Method

Now, let's talk finally about **how Paul goes about** his topic—the method and structure of this book. In verse 2 of our passage, it says “Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Now on one level, that's just Paul's standard greeting used in most of his letters. **But in the book of Ephesians specifically, it also happens to function as an outline of sorts for the book as a whole.**

Here's what I mean: nearly every scholar who has studied Ephesians has noted that it's broken up into **two halves**, almost right down the middle. **Out of the total six chapters in the book, the first three chapters focus largely on what God does.** They talk a lot about the theological realities of what God has done for us in Jesus, what it means exactly that we've been saved—they focus on what God does. That's the first half. **And then in the second half, Paul shifts to talking about how those things impact what we do.** What our *response* should be to what God has done. They unpack the way that God's actions directly impact *our actions*. **First half is on what God does, second half is on what we do. The first half is more theological, the second half is more practical. Or, you might say, the first half is about God's grace and the second half about how that grace leads to peace.** How God's grace *towards us* leads to peace *with one another*.

Now, as soon as you know that, I know that this room also breaks into **two groups**. Some of you hear that and are incredibly excited about the first half. You're like “yes. Enough with all this talk about us. Let's talk about who *God* is. Let's talk about theology and soteriology and Christology. I'll bring my systematic theology book with me each Sunday and we'll get to work.” The other half of you are like “yeahhhh...I'm thinking about just skipping the first half of the series. I don't know if I can deal with all that heady, dense, theological stuff. Can we just fast-forward to the part about why all that *matters*? What this all means for me, tomorrow morning, when I go to work?” I know that different people in this room will feel differently about the two parts of this book. So let me just speak a bit to each of those groups.

First, if you're the type that is **really excited about the what God does** side of things—great. We need people like you. We need people who love diving into complex theological waters and mining what's down there for us all. So *don't stop* loving that stuff. But *if* that's you, there's something I want you to know and keep in mind about Ephesians as we read through it. And it's this: **Paul never states theological truth without pastoral intent.** In this book, Paul is never going to tell us something just so we can be smarter than we were before knowing it. He never expounds on something just so we can mentally assent to it. **Nothing Paul says is trivial or purposeless—not a word of it. It's all meant to move his audience, and us, in a particular direction. It's meant to produce something in his us.**

For example, the *reason* Paul tells us that we've been united to God in Jesus is so that out of that, *we will work towards unity with other people in return*. The *reason* he tells Jewish believers that they've been saved by grace is *so that they will not think of themselves as “more worthy” than Gentile believers and learn to live together with them*. The *reason* he describes the power that has been made available to us is because he wants us *to rely on that power when fighting against sin and temptation*. In Ephesians, **Paul never says something to his audience simply so they can be aware of it. He tells them so they can act on it, operate in light of it.**

I think that **as Americans, we often think that knowing something is the same thing as acting on it.** In a world where we have access to more information than ever before, the inclination is to think that because we heard something, or read something, or retweeted something—that we now are somehow different now because of that. And **if we're not careful, that mindset gets carried over into how we think about following Jesus.** We think that just because we know how salvation works, that that must mean we are saved. We think that just because we know how a relationship with God works, that that must mean we have a relationship with him. We think that just because we know what the bible says on a certain topic, that we must somehow be living in light of it.

But none of that is necessarily the case. And it seems like often, **the authors** of the bible go out of their way to *insist* that it isn't. The bible is constantly trying to point out to us that **knowing something isn't the same as living in light of it.** Maybe the most explicit example of this is found in the book of James. There, it's talking about how faith is useless if it doesn't lead to action, and it actually says "you believe that God is one? Good for you! Even the demons believe that." Satan and his demons probably have great theology. *But the problem* is that it hasn't made any discernible difference in how they act, what they do—and *that's the whole purpose of theology.* One quick way to discern this in yourself: **if you are arrogant about your theology, you have missed the point of theology.** Knowing something is not the same thing as living in light of it. Not by a long shot.

So in light of that, **beware of anytime you find yourself collecting knowledge about God with no plans or pattern of acting on that knowledge.** The goal is not to have a big head, but rather a **faithful life.** Paul's intention in the book of Ephesians isn't *simply* that we would fill our minds with incredible truth about who God is and what he has done—but ultimately that that truth would *move us in a particular direction* as a result of knowing it. That *what God does* should directly influence *what we do.* **Paul never states theological truth without pastoral intent.**

That's one thing that some of us need to keep in mind. **But others of us,** our tendency isn't to overvalue the theological—it's to overvalue the practical. It's to think that if something doesn't tell me exactly what to do, it's useless information. It's to think that things in the bible only have value if they're 100% practical and tangible. Now, don't mishear me: valuing the practical is insanely important. Don't ever stop asking the question "what does this mean for me practically?" But at the same time, don't bypass the theological to *get* to the practical.

Because **it's also possible to focus so much on what the bible says we should do, that we forget to trace it back to what God has done.** An awful lot of people are under the impression that the bible is just one extended list of things to do and *not* do. That the only purpose of this book is simply to tell us what we should and shouldn't do. But the reality is that **if you want to mature and become more like Jesus, you will have to dig a little deeper than just what you do. You will have to first understand what God has done.**

Which leads me to **the other thing to keep in mind** as we work through Ephesians, which is this: **Paul grounds everything we do in what Jesus has already done.** Think about it this way: at the beginning of the letter Paul says he is writing to *who*? It's right there in v. 1—to *the saints who are in Ephesus.* To people who are already followers of Jesus. Now, does it strike you as odd at all that Paul spends half of this unpacking theological ideas to people who already know them? If Christianity is just about how we *act*, wouldn't it have made more sense for Paul to start his letter with "so you guys already know all that

‘Jesus-died-for-you-stuff,’ so let’s jump straight to the practicals”? But that’s not what Paul does. Instead, he spends *at least* half of the letter reminding them of the theological truth that they most likely already know. *Why?* Because **he grounds *what we should do* in *what Jesus has done for us*.**

For instance:

- In ch. 4, Paul’s going to drive home how as followers of Jesus should forgive one another when sinned against. That’s instruction on *what we do*. But he immediately connects it to *what Jesus has already done*—he says “forgive one another, *as God in Christ forgave you.*”
- In ch. 5, Paul is going to instruct husbands about how they should interact with their wives, with a consistent posture of self-denying sacrifice. That’s instruction on *what we should do*. But he grounds it in *what Jesus has already done*—he says they should give themselves up for their wives, *just as Christ gave himself up for the Church.*”
- Also in ch. 5, Paul is going to tell us to “walk in love towards one another,”—that’s *what we should do*. But he grounds it in “just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us”—*what Jesus has done*.

Over and over again, Paul grounds what we are to do—how we are to act—in how we think about what God through Jesus has already done. His intention is not just on *what we do*, but also *what God has done*. And the reason that matters is because when we leave that part out—**when we neglect to remember what God has done that shapes what we in turn do—we risk turning Christianity into nothing more than a set of rules to live by, an ethical code to adhere to. And Christianity is so much more than that.**

So the book of Ephesians is broken up into two halves. But they’re **not two disconnected halves**. The two halves of this letter are as interconnected and interwoven as you can imagine. They are two halves that *necessarily, always* go together. And to the degree that we focus on one to the exclusion of the other—we get a distorted, stunted version of discipleship to Jesus (if we even get a version of it at all). But together, we get the fullest picture of what it means to follow him.

Summary

So to **recap:** Ephesians is a letter, written to a church in the ancient city of Ephesus. It was written by a guy named Paul, to a group of people who were turning things upside down in their neck of the woods because of their love and faithfulness to Jesus. It’s written to explain precisely what God is doing to put things back together in the world around them. And it’s written to unpack both *what God does*, and *what we are to do* in response to that.

Now as we close, there’s **one thing I want to ask** of you guys. Hopefully we’ve given you plenty to think about as we launch into this book, and at least somewhat of a framework for understanding what’s coming down the pipeline in this series as a whole. Here’s what I want to ask of you guys. Over the summer, would y’all commit to reading the book of Ephesians at least twice? **Ephesians is a relatively short book. Think about it this way: it has six chapters, so if you set out to read a chapter a day, even if you miss a day, you’ll be able to read it all the way through it once a week.**

I think this book is so important, that I’d even love it if we all committed to reading through it **on repeat** throughout the summer. Read it as many times as we can. Maybe reading a book of the bible more than

once sounds boring to you. But here's how I'd like to challenge that notion—think about your favorite TV show. Mine is probably The Office. I'm currently watching The Office for somewhere around the 10th time through. And you know what? I don't think I've gotten bored with it once. In fact, my appreciation for the show has only grown with each time I've rewatched it. I've picked up on things that I missed before, I've understood things happening in the show from new perspectives. I've loved the show more and more each time I've watched it. And if that's true of a TV show, something not inspired by the Holy Spirit and not meant to form us into a certain types of people—how much more do you think it would be the case if we devoted some time to this book? I bet God could use it to accomplish incredible things in us, both individually and as a community. So would you consider giving it the chance to do that?

And hopefully this morning, I've given you some semblance of what to expect when you set out to read it. But **just in case you want a little extra guidance**, let me give you just one resource to help. Tomorrow morning, **when you sit down to read Ephesians, first go to Google or YouTube and search for “Bible Project: Ephesians.”** The first thing that comes up will be a nine-minute animated video, that's very easy to watch, and unpacks the major themes and movements in the book. It will set you up really well to start reading the book on your own. We'll try to put a link to it on today's sermon once we post it as well, so you have it. If you feel a little overwhelmed by charting out to read Ephesians on your own, that'll be a good supplemental resource for you.

Because ultimately, **here's my prayer** with us working through this book. **My prayer is that God would make us, City Church, here in Knoxville, into a community of people who join him in putting things back together.** And to do that, I want us to understand how he goes about that, and how we participate in it. That's what I'm praying Ephesians will give us.

Let's pray together.

[Summary statement]: If you focus on how to think to the exclusion of how to act, you end up with intellectual snobbery, finding your worth in how much more you know than others. If you focus on how to act to the exclusion of how you think, you risk boiling Christianity down to a list of moral behaviors, which it most certainly isn't. We need both. We need to think differently in order to act differently, and we need our acting differently to come directly from a renewed way of thinking about the world. Ephesians gives us both.

Intro to Series

- Longest series we will have ever done as a church thus far, so let's get acquainted

The Author

- Who Paul was (briefly, since we'll come back to it in week 6)
- What an "apostle" is – sent one

The Audience

- Ephesus - large, global city like NYC or Los Angeles
- A significant part of the city was a temple devoted to a god named Artemis (one of the seven wonders of the ancient world)
- History of the church: riots for disrupting the economy
 - Big deal. Equivalent of strip club owners writing the government officials of Knoxville and going "we've got to do something about these Christians—we can't pay our bills because people in Knoxville aren't interested enough in objectifying women at our establishments."
 - But as always, things are always exciting in the very beginning. Newness is exciting. What's harder is settling into the ins and outs of being a church family together for the long haul. Which is what Paul is trying to help with through this letter.
- More generic than most of Paul's letters. Sometimes when Paul writes to a church he gets crazy specific ("tell so-and-so to get along with so-and-so," "about that question you asked me..." "stop doing this one specific thing you're doing,"). But this letter is a good bit more generic. Some scholars think that this letter might have been written not just to one church, but to several churches in the region. **Why that matters...**

The Message

- Gives a great 30,000ft vantage point on all it means to belong to Jesus and be a part of his Church. If you master the ideas and practices in this book, you're well on your way to being a vibrant, mature follower of Jesus.
- How God puts things back together (our paraphrase of 1:10 "...to unite all things in him."). God's intention isn't just to make a bunch of people Christians and suck them up into heaven. It's much bigger and better than that. God has in mind nothing short of a healing and renewal of all creation.
- When it says "all things," Paul isn't joking around. Breadth of topics covered in this book is nothing to sneeze at: the trinity, salvation, racial reconciliation, prayer, alcohol, sex, gossip, forgiveness, spiritual gifts, marriage, parenting, slavery (that one is gonna be interesting), anger, spiritual warfare—this book has a lot to say about a lot of things. Paul's intention is to show how God puts things back together in all these different arenas of our lives individually, and our communal life as a church.

The Method

- Mention "grace and peace"—customary greeting in most of Paul's letters, but in Ephesians also serves as a rough outline for the letter.
- Some people have said that the first half of Ephesians focuses on the spiritual or theological, and the second half focuses on the practical. While I understand what they mean by that, I'm not in love with that division. Because that seems to imply that things that are spiritual or theological aren't practical, and things that are practical aren't theological.

- So I think the way I'd put it is that the First half focuses on how we *think*, second half on how we *act*. What we believe, and then what we do.
 - On the one hand, the first half of the book deals largely with how we *think*. So much of following Jesus starts with *thinking differently about the world*. Paul, in another of his letters to the Church at Rome, writes that God's people there are to "*be transformed by the renewal of their minds*"—that us being transformed into the image of Jesus starts with *thinking differently*. [Examples here if there's time]
 - But at the same time, following Jesus has a lot to do with how we *act*. How we *think* necessarily fleshes itself out in how we go about everyday life. Jesus at the end of his sermon on the mount talks about two people—one who built their house on the sand, and one who built their house on the rock, and the difference between those two houses. And he says the difference, what made the house on the rock so different, is that he heard what Jesus said *and put it into practice*. That last part is important.
 - Following Jesus has everything to do with how we *think*, and how we *act*. Both matter equally. That's why Paul devotes plenty of time to both in Ephesians.
- Speak to people excited and not excited about both:
 - *To those excited about the first half*: Paul never states theological truth without pastoral intent. When you accumulate theological knowledge without pressing it down into everyday life, you get the Pharisees. You get cold, condescending, theological bullies.
 - *To those excited about the second half*: Everything that Paul instructs them to do is rooted in what God has first done. When you emphasize what we are to do without grounding it in the gospel, you risk boiling Christianity down to a list of moral virtues, which it is most certainly not.

Practically, during this series...

- If you're in the first group and love theological concepts and ideas, make a habit of asking which of those are leading to the practices we see in the second half of the book. If you believe you're forgiven, has it made you a forgiving person? If you believe you've been shown incredible grace, has it made you gracious towards others? If you believe that God saving you has nothing to do with how put-together of a person you are, how do you interact with people who are less put-together than you? We need to remember that while following Jesus *starts* with how you think, it doesn't stop there.
- If you're in the second group, and love practical steps, you love to-do lists, you follow instructions well—if you're excited about a list of things to do—great. But make sure you're regularly asking the question "am I doing these things because they're the right thing to do, or as a response to what God has done for me in Jesus?" It is possible to have a squeaky-clean life and be doing all the practical things Paul says to do in the second half of the book, and still have a heart that is far from God and wants nothing to do with him. Ask yourself, *is that what I'm doing?*
- Let's read through the book as a church each week. Ephesians is a relatively short book. If you can read 22 verses a day, you can read the whole book once a week. Another way to think about it is that there are six short chapters. So if you set out to read a chapter a day, even if you miss a day, you'll be able to read it all the way through each week. We'll get into this in the last week of the series, but part of the thing about teaching through a book like this is that to conquer it, you have to break it down into chunks. And while that's good for unpacking it's rich detail, it can be

problematic if we start thinking that these chunks were meant to be read isolated from the rest of the book. I think reading through the whole book will help us guard against hearing it that way.

'The church must be known simultaneously for its purity of doctrine and the reality of its community. Our churches have so often been only preaching points with very little emphasis on community' Francis Schaeffer in 'The Gospel' by @rayortlund pic.twitter.com/WOtX0E8Z3c

Could mention how scholars think it could be a circular letter, fill-in-the-blank style. "Whether or not you care all that much about that, here's why it matters: Ephesians is definitely the most 'universal' of Paul's letters. It's the most "universal." Meaning it's written very much for the church at large. Others of Paul's letters are written often with specific churches and people in mind, speaking to specific issues coming up in those churches. Ephesians seems to be a lot broader than that. It's written to communicate to the church at large what a church is meant to be.

Which means for us, if we as a church were to grasp and begin to live into the themes in this letter, we'd be a beautiful representative of the gospel.

This is Paul's theological masterpiece. What _____ is to _____, what _____ is to _____, (*do something controversial from a movie or music pop culture perspective*), this is to Paul's letters. If you grasp the concepts in this book, you will grasp virtually everything you need to know about what it means to follow Jesus.

Split into two halves: first half focuses on *orthodoxy* (which is a snobby way to say "right belief), and second half focuses on *orthopraxy* (which is a snobby way to say right *practice*). In the first half, Paul will try and unpack everything we need to *know* about God. In the second half, he will explain, very practically, how all of what we *know* about God should *look* when believed and lived out.

So even though it does read in many ways like two different halves, I want to provide a word of caution regarding that. The temptation, at least for me, when reading Ephesians is to view the first half as theological and the second half as practical. So me being very much a pragmatist, I gravitate towards the second half, and just try to endure the first half. But to do that with Ephesians would be a mistake. Because the two halves of the book are connected. It's not so much that the first half is theological and the second half is practical, as it is that the first half is the practical part A, and the second half is practical part B. For Paul, theology is one of the most practical things in the world. So much so that when he hears of practical problems in a local church, he immediately starts by writing theology to them. That's because, for Paul, practical problems always start with theological misunderstandings. If the church was struggling with sexual sin, Paul knew that they needed tangible steps to address that sexual sin, but that first they needed a fuller understanding of who God was and what he created the body and human sexuality *for*. If they were struggling with how to live lives following Jesus in a culture that was hostile to Jesus, they needed tangible instruction on how to do that, but they also needed a fuller understanding of who God is and how he relates to his people in the midst of persecution and cultural pressure. And, as we'll see in the book of Ephesians, if a church was struggling with racial tensions, Paul knew that they needed tangible instruction on how to address those tensions, but even more they needed an understanding of who God is and how he relates to all races and all nations in the world.

For Paul, the practical always *starts* with the theological. Everything we do ultimately has its root in what we believe about God. [*Illustration about how Paul is like a good mechanic—wants to fix the problem, but wants to do that by fixing the thing **causing** the problem*]

On one level, "grace and peace" is just Paul's standard greeting, the words he starts most of his letters with. But on another level, "grace and peace" has the added significance of being a great summation

of the letter to the Ephesians. In it, Paul will talk a lot about the grace given to God's people through Jesus, and then explaining how that grace leads to *peace*. How it leads to leaving things better than they were before. Put simply, Ephesians is a letter about how God, through us grace, puts the world back together.

<http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2018/03/sullivan-things-are-better-than-ever-why-are-we-miserable.html>

Deleted from first draft:

Now, that's at least *one of* the groups of people this letter is written to. In some of your bibles, you might see a footnote after the words "in Ephesus." And if you look down at what it says, it's something like "the words 'in Ephesus' are omitted in early manuscripts." Meaning that in the earliest physical copies of this letter we have, the words 'in Ephesus' aren't in there. A lot of people think that's because this letter wasn't *just* sent to this one church in Ephesus, but was actually a letter that was meant to be passed around among all the churches in the region *around* Ephesus.

And that definitely jives with how a lot of it is written. **It's by far the most generic of Paul's letters.** Here's what I mean by that. Most of the rest of Paul's letters have very specific things in them. Paul will randomly say things in them like "hey tell so-and-so I said hi!"¹ or "hey tell these two jokers to get along and stop being dramatic"² or "about that question you asked me, here's my answer."³ Often, Paul is saying specific things to specific people he knows or speaking to specific things happening in the church itself. There's not very much of that in Ephesians. **Paul doesn't seem to be writing to address any one particular issue or address any one particular thing.** This letter reads much broader than that. More like a generic description of what God is up to in the world that he wants various audiences to know and learn and take to heart.

I tell you that in order to say **that this book is actually very accessible for us today.** Some books of the bible, you have to do a lot of research and background and cultural context before you can *start* to understand what they're trying to say. It's much less that way with Ephesians. Except for 1-2 small exceptions, the book of Ephesians really could be written to a church in the 21st century. Issues that they face are very similar to the issues we face. So as we go through this letter, we won't have to work quite as hard to understand its cultural context as we would for a lot of other books. This makes it a great book for you to read on your own. Because of its accessibility, you don't have to have any seminary-level understanding of the bible to benefit greatly from it. **If you're newer to following Jesus, or newer to studying your bible, Ephesians is a great place to start, because of how down-to-earth and readable it is.**

¹ Romans 16:3-15

² Philippians 4:2

³ 1 Corinthians 7:1
