



Rooted

in the soil of a
vibrant, growing faith

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Ephesians 2.1-10
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I. Connecting With One Another

Martin Luther once wrote that grace was “the hinge on which all turns.” Why do you think he would say that?

What imagery does a hinge bring to mind? Do you agree with his statement? Why – or why not?

II. Introduction to this Study

This week, we continue to engage the central doctrines of the Protestant Reformation, known as the five *solas*. We’re calling this series “Rooted: In the Soil of a Vibrant, Growing Faith” because we believe that each of these theological truths are planted – and can plant us – firmly in the soil of biblical Christianity. Furthermore, it is out of these truths that we can live fruitful lives as disciples of Jesus Christ. If you missed either the study guide or message the past two weeks, click onto gspc.org/dig-deeper.

This week, we are (re)discovering the centrality of God’s grace. A common (mis)conception of Christian faith is that we come to God on our own, when we realize that we are in need of Him. The Scriptures, however, paint a very different picture: That it’s God who is running after us! This is central to the Scriptures: Think of God hearing the cry of His people enslaved in Egypt, of Jesus’ incarnation and countercultural ministry, of the Holy Spirit sending the early church – and us – out into all the world to proclaim the good news of this searching out and saving God!

III. Study the Text

- a. Read Ephesians 1.1-2.10. Using your own words, try to summarize the main points the Apostle Paul is communicating.

Scholars note that the first and second chapters of Ephesians communicate the same theology, but from different perspectives, the first chapter from God’s perspective, the second chapter from humanity’s. Where do you see similarities? Where do you see common words used? What verses really speak to you powerfully? (there’s no right or wrong answer, by the way)

- b. Reread Ephesians 2.1-3. Paul uses some very strong language to describe our lives before we were “made alive in Christ.” Why do you think he does so? Do you feel like you were ever “dead in your transgressions and sins”? Why or why not?

Imagine you were raised in a good Christian family who never missed a Sunday attending a good Christian church, and after high school, you were a good Christian college student, and so on (you’re starting to get the idea, right?). Would Paul’s description “dead in your transgressions and sins” apply to you? Why or why not?

- c. Flip over to Romans 3.9-12. How do you understand Paul’s words here? What do they say about being “good”?

Rather interestingly, Paul is here quoting passages from the Hebrew Scriptures: Psalm 14.1-3, 53.1-3 and Ecclesiastes 7.20. Check those out too, if you really want to dig in!

Before turning back to Ephesians 2, be sure to notice Romans 3.23-24.

- d. In Ephesians 3.3, Paul links the Ephesian Christians (and our?) previous lives with those who are disobedient, who "gratify the cravings of [the] flesh and follow its desires and thoughts." Paul is using "flesh" to refer to sinful behavior. Notice how he includes the words "desires" and "thoughts" as well.
Let's return to our example of being raised in the church and "never doing wrong." How, then, does Ephesians 3.3 reinterpret "dead in transgressions and sins" as not only actions, but also thoughts and desires? In this case, is there anyone who *hasn't been* "dead in sin"?
- e. Reread Ephesians 2.4-5. We've previously discussed that Ephesians 1 is written from God's perspective, and chapter 2 from humanity's. And yet, who is the "acting agent" in verses 4-5? Do they depict us "running after God" in any way? How do these verses reform our understanding of our spiritual journey?
Preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones once stated that we have the whole gospel in two words: "But God." Terry L. Johnson explains: "The surprise implicit in the apostle's, 'But God', may only be understood if our death, defiance and doom are grasped. Moreover, what God graciously does, he freely does. He is not under obligation. Why do we say that? Because this is what makes grace, grace. Grace is 'the unmerited goodness or love of God to those who have forfeited it, and are by nature under a sentence of condemnation.'"
- f. Flip over to Luke 15. Read verses 11-32 (if not the first two parables in verses 1-10 as well). How do these stories, told by Jesus to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, reveal God's grace? What do death, defiance and doom look like in these stories? How do these parables reveal the gospel in two words, "But God"?
- g. Reread Ephesians 2.6-10. What do you think Paul means when he writes, "God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus"? We aren't in the heavenly realms now, are we? If not, what does he mean? And why would he utilize such imagery?
- h. After boldly declaring our inability to save ourselves by our own actions, Paul asserts that God prepared us – in advance – to do good works in the name of Jesus Christ. Why do you think he talks about good works now? Is he contradicting himself? Why or why not?

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. Is God's grace just something that worked on our behalf in the past, drawing us to faith, or does it continue to work as well? Why do you think what you do?
- b. In what ways do you continue in transgressions and sins? Could a reminder of God's grace not only help you to trust in forgiveness but also in God's continuing work to live a life of holiness?
- c. How have you seen the two-word gospel "But God" in your own life? In other words, how have you seen God chasing after you?
- d. The Prodigal Son story is really about two sons, of course: One younger irreligious brother and one older religious brother, each of whom struggle to accept the gospel of a Father who runs after us. Where do you see yourself in that story today?
- e. Think for a few moments about the way God made you, about the things you're interested in, about the activities you like to do. How could those point to some of the good works God has prepared – in advance – for you to do? In other words, how can the ways you're gifted be used by God in the world?

V. Spend some time in prayer:

- a. Thank God that He ran after you, forgiving you in the blood of Jesus, saving you by grace through faith!
- b. Pray that through our this series, we might rediscover and be re-rooted in true biblical Christianity, and that doing so might guide us in our ongoing discernment process;
- c. Lift up our children, students and families, praying that they would be rooted in God's grace;
- d. Ask that God would use Good Shepherd to declare the good news of this simple, yet profound, two-word gospel in our community;
- e. Pray that God would give you a heart for those who haven't heard of His grace, who don't know the God who runs after us, and that He would empower you to join Him in His mission to and for them.