

## NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Heaven on Earth\_ Ephesians 1 - 'An Extra Measure of Grace'

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Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. We know it as the Lord's Prayer but it's more than a prayer. It is our mission. It is our vision. We talk a lot about going to heaven and there's nothing wrong with that but we get this backwards. Heaven is not just a future tense reality it is a present tense reality. Now I know that that's a little counterintuitive, might even be countercultural, but Heaven is invading Earth right here, right now. How? How? Well, when we love our enemies, heaven invades earth. When we pray for those who persecute us or bless those who curse us, heaven invades earth. When we care for the poor, the widow, the orphan, when we exercise faith, hope and love heaven invades earth. When a relationship is reconciled, when someone experiences miraculous healing, when justice flows like a river, heaven invades earth. This weekend, we begin a new series, a new season. This is more than a title this is our prayer, this is our mission 'Heaven on Earth'.

Let me do a quick flyover. If you are at our online campus, there is a notes tab; you will find a link to the Bible project. Would you take eight minutes and 57 seconds that's how long it is to watch their overview on the book of Ephesians - great on ramp to this book two this series. Over the next 12 weeks we're going to walk through the book of Ephesians verse by verse and we will do it Monday to Friday as we shift gears to daily church. More on that in a few minutes, but you can sign up [NCC.re/daily](http://NCC.re/daily).

Now the book of Ephesians it forms this beautiful chiasm, this mirrored image, if you will, and listen our media team, our production team, they're amazing. Dave and Reagan and Josh, JJ, Ethan, Robbie, all of our volunteers, man that trailer with this beautiful picture of what the book of Ephesians is all about. Let me butterfly cut this book, six chapters, 155 verses you can read it in about 20 minutes flat. Klyne Snodgrass said pound for pound Ephesians may be the most influential document in history. Now that's a pretty bold statement but give it 12 weeks and see if you don't add an amen.

Paul is writing around 62 AD and this is sort of like Dr. King's letter from a Birmingham jail. Paul is in prison in Rome. I've actually stood in that prison cell in Rome where Paul is purported to have written this letter. He's writing to the church at Ephesus, but we think it's a circular letter. So it went to Ephesus, then probably forwarded by FedEx to some of these other churches in Asia Minor. The first half of Ephesians, it's all about this heavenly realm. We have been blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing. Where? In the heavenly realm. Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father. Where? In the heavenly realm. All power and dominion is his. That heavenly reality is our identity in chapter one. It's our destiny in chapter two. It's our authority in chapter three. And then Paul flips this script. And there's this word therefore, kind of right in the middle of the book. Now preachers love this because you got to find out what the therefore is there for, and this is where we shift to the earthly realm. It's all about behavior in form by belief. It's about culture transformed by Christ, this is heaven invading earth. And so the net result is unity in chapter four, its maturity in chapter five and then finally, its security in chapter six. And so ready or not, here we go.

Ephesians one verse one, and we'll put it on the screen. *"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus: grace and peace to you from our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ."*

We read right past Paul, we read right past apostle, listen, Paul and apostle go together like Ruth and Chris, right? Steakhouse, okay? But this is an ancient oxymoron. Listen, before becoming Paul, his name was Saul. He was a domestic terrorist who hunted Christians like wild animals. He is the least likely person on the planet to become an apostle. And listen, so, if you're watching this weekend, you aren't sure you're a first round draft pick. Okay, welcome to the team to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus.

Job 11:6 says true wisdom has two sides. Now, you've heard me say this many, many times - truth is found in the tension of opposites. Okay? Lots of two sided truths in Scripture and you have to flip the coin to see both sides. And I think this is a great example. You've got another chiasm right here from the heavenly point of view we're saints. This is how God sees us, that is our position in Christ but from an earthly POV we are faithful in Christ Jesus. There's this process called sanctification. We are being conformed to the image of Christ. So in Christ, you are perfectly and positionally sanctified. Your sin is forgiven and forgotten. There is no record of wrong. You are the righteousness of Christ, all of it right here, right now. Practically speaking, sanctification is a process. You are a work in progress, so am I. God is working his plans, his purposes, his promises in your life and so you are sanctified - past tense - that moment you put your faith in Christ. But you are being sanctified present tense. Well, which isn't Pastor Mark? No, no, no, it's not either or it is both, and. And that'll make a lot more sense as we move forward, absolutely critical as we talk about identity formation in Christ.

Now, let me back up the bus a little bit. I want to take us on a field trip this weekend to ancient Ephesus. If content is king, then context is queen. So let me give us a little bit of backdrop as we begin to look at this book. Ephesus, one of the largest cities in the ancient world, best guess few hundred thousand people had an amphitheatre that sat 25,000 people. I'm going to show you a picture of these ancient ruins, think Russell Crowe and Gladiator. Ephesus was a port city. It's sat at the intersection of four major trade routes and it was Wall Street. This is where the Caesars open up their offshore bank accounts. Even more important than all of that is the temple to Artemis actually ranked as one of the seven Ancient Wonders of the World four times the size of the Parthenon, 127 columns if you're keeping score at home and I'll show you that artist's rendering.

A few years ago, I read this book titled, The Geography of Genius. Fascinating book about how different geographies have a unique genius to them. You've got Athens, Greece, sixth century BC, a lot of philosophers. You've got Florence, Italy, 14th century a lot of artists, right? And then you've got even Silicon Valley 20th century and a lot of technological breakthroughs. And so those geographies and demographics are marked by a unique genius. Okay, are you still with me? Let me take this a little bit further. I think different cities have different personalities. Have you found this to be true? They have a unique tone a unique tenor. They even have a unique pace and there's a word for it - urban metabolism. But I want to take it even a step further than that. I think different places have different idols, there are powers and principalities. And I think it's our responsibility to identify those idols. Why? So that we can operate in the opposite spirits. We just finished the book of Daniel, is this not what Daniel did? He would not be named or tamed by Babylonian culture, lived counterculture for 70 years. I think we're called to do the same.

Now we'll talk a little bit more about this in upper zoom. But I do wonder if political correctness is one of those powers or principalities right here in Washington, DC. Question, would you rather be biblically correct or politically correct? Because sometimes they are at odds with each other and I'm just going to say it. I think sometimes it's harder to be biblically correct when you sit in the shadow of the Capitol, the White House and the Supreme Court.

Long story short, Ephesus is all about Artemis idols all over the city. She is their patron goddess, the goddess of fertility. And so when sailors would dock at Ephesus, they were greeted by signs, some of these signs still exist, that would point them to the nearest brothel. To say that the city was central what would be an understatement. The Temple of Artemis would have been surrounded by temple prostitutes. Every year, they celebrated the Festival of Artemis, and they would take to the streets of Ephesus and they would carry this statue of Artemis down to the harbor, almost like a Thanksgiving Day float. And they would, in a sense, baptize her in that water and wash the statue of Artemis believing that it would restore her virginity. Now I know that we have a lot of different ages listening and so I want to be careful right here, but let's just say that she lost it and they lost it by the time they got back to the temple.

Ephesians five Paul is talking about marriage as a metaphor for the church. And here's what he says. <sup>25</sup>  
*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> so that he might sanctify her, (How?) having cleansed her by the washing of water (you getting where this is going?) with the word."*

We read right past this. The Ephesians would have known exactly what Paul is referencing. He is flipping the script and he's calling these Christians to live counterculture. How? Well, in a culture where there were very few sexual boundaries, Paul is advocating monogamy sex. It's a sacred covenant between a husband and a wife. It was countercultural 2,000 years ago and it is once again. You need a biblical theology of sexuality if you're gonna live, countercultural, and I might add, and love everybody who doesn't believe the way that you do. I've never seen a statue of Artemis, but she is alive and well. We follow Christ in a culture that parades Artemis through the streets.

All right, how are we doing? Let's keep going. A few weeks ago talked about this Jewish hermeneutic called Pardes - four levels of learning four levels of study, kind of different ways of engaging scripture at different levels. And so level one is Peshat - it is a plain reading of Scripture. And I want to say there is nothing wrong with reading the Bible devotionally. In fact, this is such a great place to start; you do not need a seminary degree to hear the still small voice of the Spirit. That said, I kind of think of Peshat as like the 13% of the iceberg that's above the surface of the water. I mean, come on there is 87% beneath the surface.

And so I won't share all of these levels, but the third level is Derash and its connecting the dots. I would liken this to a Google search that produces lots of hyper links. It is letting scripture interpret scripture. And that's what we want to do this weekend.

About a decade before writing this letter, Paul went on three missionary journeys, visited Ephesus twice. And I'm going to show you a map of that third missionary journey just to get you oriented. It starts in Antioch, which is really a home church for Paul, a little family reunion in Tarsus, which is where Paul is from, and then he heads west and I bet you'll recognize some of these cities. You've got Thessalonica, you've got Philippi, Athens, and then he doubles back. Now what the itinerary doesn't reveal is how long Paul spent in each of these cities. Of all

the churches that Paul planted - Ready - he spends more time in Ephesus than anywhere else, at least two years. And it may have been the most disciplined church in the ancient world. Paul is writing to people that he pastored, okay, people he baptized and disciplined, people that he married and families where he had done burials. I mean, these are people that he knew by name.

Now, if you had the Bible, I want you to turn over to Acts 19. It's the backdrop for a lot of what we're going to look at over these coming 12 weeks. When Paul arrives there are only 12 disciples in Ephesus, that's it, but that's all it takes. Give God 12 people who go all in and it might turn into 2 billion couple millennia later.

Now, here's the fascinating thing to me. They have only heard about John's baptism, and so they have no idea who the Holy Spirit is. Come on if you try to follow Jesus without the help of the Holy Spirit good luck with that, okay. When we get to chapter five it says, "Don't be drunk with wine but be filled with the Holy Spirit." Present imperative verb - keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit I am below average, with the help of the Holy Spirit game time whoop.

Let me highlight four things that are happening here in Acts 19. If you're taking notes, you can jot these down.

1) You've got unbelievable miracles happening in Ephesus. It says that there handkerchiefs that touch the disciples were used to heal people, but what what? What? And I say, do it again, Lord, do it again. I'm believing for a supernatural demonstration of God's love and power. We have experienced a lot of miracles. I don't think we've seen anything yet. You wait and see or better yet taste and see.

2) You've got radical repentance. Now this is a key ingredient when it comes to revival. Radical repentance sets the stage for radical reconciliation, which sets the stage for revival. And I might add reformation in the church and renaissance in culture. Long story short, the Ephesians were incredibly spiritual. They also dabbled in the occult. And so when you begin to follow Christ, like that's where you look, okay. So what do you do with all of these sorcery, scrolls or books that they had? I mean, this is pretty amazing an epic bonfire in Acts 19. They burn the boats, they burn the bridge. It says that the books were valued at 50,000 drachma. Now you know me well enough that I'm going to do the math and so a drachma is a day's wage. I multiplied it by the average daily wage in DC. This bonfire, they burn \$9,850,000 in DC, dollars.

3) You've got incredible courage. The Ephesians actually riot in the streets and so they're dragging some of these Christians into the amphitheatre. Now, 1 Corinthians 15 Paul references this moment he says, "I fought with wild beasts in Ephesus." Now I want to be honest here I we don't know whether this is literal or figurative. In fact, I think I translate it literally but one way or the other, Paul, is you've got to live counter culture when you've got people rioting in the streets. They actually shout for two hours great is Artemis of the Ephesians. When you mess with someone's idols, it may just incite a riot.

Now, finally, Paul held daily discussions in the lecture hall of Tyrannus, from 10 o'clock in the morning to three o'clock in the afternoon. So five days a week, five hours a day, six days a week and that is 3,120 hours. And so that's about a third of the way to that 10,000 hour rule in two years flat. And I wonder if that's why this letter is much less corrective than say Corinthians, and far more proactive.

The only ceiling, on your intimacy with God and your impact on the world is daily spiritual disciplines. God is shifting us from a weekly mindset to a daily rhythm. And I'm not saying you have to give him five hours. Listen, give him five minutes. And that really is the challenge would you sign up [NCC.re/daily](https://ncc.re/daily)? You can download our brand new app. You give God five minutes and then see what happens. Why? Because we're not just going to study Ephesians we're going to do Ephesians. Let's follow their example daily church, Monday to Friday.

Now all of that adds up to verse 17. "*The name of the Lord was magnified.*" All of that adds up to verse 20, "*The Word of God spread widely.*" The Gospel brings a city to its knees. The Gospel shifts an entire socio economic system on its axis. They put idolatry out of business. They experienced this radical reconciliation as they tear down the dividing wall of hostility in Ephesians 2. And I love verse 23, "*There was no small commotion.*" Come on, do it again, God. We are not just trying to build a church, we are trying to bless a city to the third and fourth generation.

All right, that's a lot of context; it's a lot of backdrop. I'm going to go back to verse one, we're going to look at two words and then we're done. "1Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful to Christ Jesus: (Here it is) 2Grace and peace to you from our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

All of Paul's epistles start with the same salutation - wonder twin powers activate form of grace, form of peace. Grace and peace, set the tone, shift the atmosphere, start revolutions and stop riots.

I'm gonna take these one at a time we'll start with grace. It is the unmerited favor of God. Mercy is not getting what you deserve. Grace is getting what you do not deserve. The only way you can qualify for it is by not qualifying for it. And listen, the guy who is writing this letter knows a little something about it. Paul self identifies as the worst of sinners. What that tells me is he knew an awful lot about the grace of God.

Let me pause right here. I'm deeply concerned about canceled culture. One wrong word one false step, subscription cancelled. We are writing people off left and right, well double entendre right there, worked hard at this okay. The good news, there is a vaccine for cancel culture and it is called grace, Jesus, full of grace and truth. Truth means I'm going to be honest with you no matter what. Grace means I'm going to love you, no matter what. It's loving people that you don't even like. And you know what? That's usually the people who don't look like us, vote like us or think like us.

Jerry Bridges said this, "Our worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach of God's grace. And your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God's grace." Every day is a day of relating to God on the basis of His grace alone. That is so good. The Gospel starts with grace and His grace is sufficient. And that's a word for someone this weekend. I feel it in my spirit, you needed it and now you know it. His grace is sufficient in your life.

A few weeks ago, Lora and I did this listen and learn series. And we were talking about restorative justice and we interviewed Marcus Bullock, man, he is a new friend of mine. He made a mistake when he was 15, carjacked someone, got tried as an adult spent eight years in prison from the age of 15 to the age of 23. His mom wrote him a letter every day. He said, "Mom, don't do it." She didn't listen. She would send him pictures of a hamburger and say someday you're going to eat this. She would send him pictures of a mattress and say someday you're going to sleep on this. I was so moved by his story and by his spirit that I had to ask him the question. How does a 15 year

old kid survive eight years in prison? He did not hesitate. He answered with one word, you know what it is? Grace, Grace.

That is how God turned Saul into Paul. That is how God turns sinners into saints. That's how God turns Marcus from a prisoner into this entrepreneur. I love this. He applied for 41 jobs, couldn't get any of them. Why? Because they all asked if he had a felony on his record. Finally, he got an application that said if you committed a felony in the last seven years, well, he'd been in prison for eight years. Okay, so he was able to finally answer no, gets a job at a paint store, turns it into his own contracting business. And then start something called Flikshop, where families can send picture postcards to their loved ones in prison, come on somebody.

Now, let me say this again for good measure. If you confess your sins, He's faithful and just to forgive you your sins and to cleanse you from all on righteousness. You are justified just as if you had never sinned, no record of wrong that is the grace of God. Would you let God grace you this weekend?

Now, let me touch on peace. I'm going to unpack this idea a lot more but peace is not passive. In Ephesians 4:3, Paul says make every effort every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond, of peace. It takes some blood, sweat and tears; you have to fight for it. If you're married, you know what I'm talking about. Okay? It is not easy.

I want to paint a picture. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus is on a boat, they're crossing the Sea of Galilee. And here's the deal Sea of Galilee, 700 feet below sea level. And then you've got the Golan Heights to the east 2,500 feet above sea level. And so the topography like creates these perfect storms. And so sure enough, a furious storm of hurricane proportions arose and the waves kept beating into the boat. Do you remember what happened? The disciples wake Jesus up; they are panicked, to say the least. And these are professional fishermen. What does Jesus do? Ah, it's one of my favorite moments in the Gospels. He gets up and he rebuked the wind and the waves, - Peace be still. You know what, this is a moment for those of us who follow Jesus to stay calm and carry on with faith, hope and love.

This week at work I bet I bet the winds are gonna blow. I bet someone is going to make waves. Someone's going to say something or do something that is going to rock the boat. Now what are you going to do? What are you going to do? It's a lot easier to act like a Christian than it is to react like one. A lot of us we wake up we panic. No, no, no. Let's be the people that shift the atmosphere that say, peace be still. Come on. You're gonna have an opportunity this week and I'm believing that you're going to show God's grace and peace.

Now I'm going to close with this 2018 Chadwick Boseman gave the commencement address at his alma mater, Howard University. He knew then what we know now, he had stage four, colon cancer. It makes his words even more meaningful, even more powerful. By the way, in that speech talks about a role he refused to play, because it reinforced the stereotype that he was trying to change. Now that takes courage, and it takes something else. Are you ready? An extra measure of grace. It's the title of the message. It's my whole point this weekend. I just believe this is a moment where we need an extra measure of grace. How do you find the strength to play King T'Challa when cancer is ravaging your body? How in the world do you love on and encourage all of these kids with cancer when you know that you're dying from the same thing? I think it takes an extra measure of grace.

We are the grace givers. We are the peacemakers. We're going to talk more about it in our NCC daily. I'm out of time. Monday to Friday, we're going to talk about passing the peace. How do we be these grace givers, peacemakers in our culture? But I'll quit with this. An old Welsh pastor named John Thomas said, you supply the grit and God will supply the grace. I'm believing that for you this weekend.

You're here and you've never experienced the grace of God. You mean the cross to Christ. He went to that cross because he wants to show you the full measure of His grace. Listen, it's as simple as confessing our sin and professing our faith. If that's you this weekend, you want to take a step of faith. You want to experience God's grace. Would you just raise a hand right now at our online campus? You'll see a button right there. And you're here and you need an extra measure of grace.

As our band comes, we're just about to sing about it. Our prayer team is waiting to pray with you to pray for you. You need that extra measure of grace, you need the peace that passes, all understanding. I don't know all that you're going through. I know that all of us are fighting a battle that no one else knows about. But I know that his grace is sufficient. There's a little line in this song. I love it. Grace holds that ground. I believe Grace is going to invade your life this week and the peace of God is going to invade your life. Heaven is going to invade earth. May his kingdom come, may his will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name amen