

together

a four-week study in Ephesians

Together (Ephesians) (Week 1/4) Together in Christ

Small Group Discussion Questions

Connect *As we begin a new series, how do you think you could best prepare for it?*

Warm-Up

1. Why do you think people have been so active in using AI Chat for therapy and companionship?
2. What does this reveal about our *right wrongings* but *some of the brokenness of our world*?

Read Ephesians 1:3-8

3. What is Paul's favourite phrase in Ephesians? What does it mean to be "in Christ"?
4. How do we become connected *in* Christ? How has this been made possible for us?
5. Where are you most tempted to seek connection, security, or affirmation outside of being in Christ?
6. What does it mean to be 'blessed'? How is this commonly misused in our culture?
7. What is the cause of the blessing we have received? Why is this so important to recognise?
8. What are the three 'headline' blessings that we have already received in Christ? Step through each of these and try to explain, (a) what it means; and (b) how is that significant to you?
9. Is Paul's emphasis on *how we have come to faith* or *what is true for those who have responded*?

Read Ephesians 1:8-10

10. According to Paul, what is the ultimate goal of all of history?
11. Why do you think it is popular to believe that there is no ultimate plan or point to the universe? Why is the comprehensive unity of all things under Christ such good news?
12. When will that ultimate future arrive? What do you think that will look like in practice?

Read Ephesians 1:11-14

13. What is the ultimate purpose? Identify the three places (in vv.1-14) where Paul makes this point.
14. What does it actually mean to be purposed for the praise of God's glory?
15. In what ways is your being part of God's rescued people praise in and of itself? *How is your life also an ongoing response to and recognition of who God is, what he has done, and all that he has promised to do?*
16. What is one area of your life in which you would like to direct more to the praise of God? Try to work through what this could look like in day-to-day or week-to-week practice?
17. How does being in Christ also make us into a people? How might that influence your prioritisation of God's people this coming year?

Apply *If our lives are to be "for the praise of God's glory", what is one area (e.g., relationships, work, time, money, use of technology) in which that purpose could become more visible?*

Pray *Heavenly Father, thank you for every spiritual blessing that you have poured out on us in Christ. Please help us to respond with delight and praise. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

GOING DEEPER

Together (Ephesians) (Week 1/4) Together in Christ

Small Group Discussion Questions

On Your Front Line this Week

Take some time this week to give thanks to God for 2025. Write down a few things you are thankful for, as reminders to yourself when it is harder to recall how God has been at work in your life.

For Families

- *Download:* some of the family resources to use at home: stbartskids.org

Listen, Watch, and Read

- *Listen (sermon):* “Enjoying every Spiritual Blessing” by Chris Wright:
https://www.allsouls.org/Media/AllMedia.aspx?show_media=119556&show_file=129912
- *Listen (sermon):* “Praising People” by Vaughan Roberts:
https://www.allsouls.org/Media/AllMedia.aspx?show_media=119556&show_file=129912
- *Listen (sermon):* “Bathed in Blessing” by Tim Keller:
<https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/bathed-in-blessing/>
- *Listen (sermon):* “Safe in the Plan” by Tim Keller:
<https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/safe-in-the-plan/>
- *Listen (sermon):* “Marked as Possession” by Tim Keller:
<https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/marked-as-possession/>

Series Resources

- *Read:* “The Message of Ephesians” by John Stott. 📖
- *Read:* “The Vision of Ephesians” by N. T. Wright.
- *Read:* “Gathered Together” by Karl Deenick. 📖
- *Watch:* “Ephesians” by the Bible Project:
<https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-ephesians/>
- *Previous Series* from St Bart’s (including Children’s Resources):
<https://www.stbarts.com.au/sermon-series/ephesians>

📖 Available to borrow from the St Bart’s Library (Toowoomba): stbarts.com.au/library

TOGETHER

Week 1/4 "Together in Christ"
by the Rev'd Adam Lowe (04/01/2026)

그리스도 안에서 함께 함
在基督里同在

Bible Passage: Ephesians 1:1-14

*Heavenly Father, thank you for every spiritual blessing that you have poured out on us in Christ.
Please help us to respond with delight and praise. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

If you could sum up 2025 in just a few words, I think *for better or for worse, or perhaps for better AND for worse*, it was a year characterised by AI — Artificial Intelligence. ChatGPT really hit its stride (it went from 1 million *weekly* users in 2023 to 1 billion weekly users in 2025). Every tech company desperately pushed their AI features *on you* whenever you opened their apps or their websites. *And even TIME magazine's person of the year, wasn't a person, but a group of people, somewhat ominously described as: The AI Architects. It's been a year of AI.*

But what has been a bit more surprising, *at least to some*, is how people are using it.

- In August 2025 when OpenAI launched the fifth version/model of their chatbot, there was passionate push back from *some* users, not because it hallucinated even more, but because: the tone of the conversation changed. People felt they had lost a friend.
- Users described that they experienced a sense of grief, even corresponding mourning. /
- There's even been a number of examples of people marrying AI chatbots. /
- But it turns out that seeking connection from AI may not *just* be a fringe activity./ The Harvard Business Review reported that in just one year, the top use of AI has gone from '*generating ideas*' to '*therapy and companionship*'. //
- So, what is going on here?
- I think it's revealing of at least two things:
We all have a *right* longing for relationship. It's part of being human.
But in a broken world, *for all sorts of reasons*,
we often go looking in all the wrong places. //

- The vision for relationship in the Bible is the sweetest of antidotes!
Because in many ways the grand narrative of the Bible is one of relationship.
- God has a plan not just for his church.
But also for the whole world.
- Connection need not be found *or faked* in a machine of our own creation,
but that we can know, love, and are loved by *the* creator of the world.
- And that the way that we get connected together with God,
is not by opening up a chat prompt, *but through his Son*. By being IN CHRIST.

That's what Paul is really excited about in the letter to the Ephesians.

- His favourite-favourite way of describing the church are those who are '*in Christ*'.

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful **IN** Christ Jesus:*

- That phrase, "In Christ" is on-repeat in Ephesians.
Eleven times in just eleven verses here!
- Paul wants us to see, that not only is there nothing better than union with Christ,
but that when you do become a Christian, the connection between us and God is so close,
so intimate, that we're caught up in him — through his death and resurrection,
and also as a result connected to one another as his body.
- That's part of what the image of baptism is all about.

- Not only that Jesus died and rose for us,
but that as we put our trust in him, we're caught up in his death and resurrection.

We're beginning 2026 by plumbing the rich implications of what it means to be in Christ.

- ...as community, on mission, *and forever*.
- But let's start with first things first: *what does it mean to be together in Christ?*
- Four things. /
(I promise you that this is not a new approach for 2026.) /
- But as Paul writes these fourteen verses, *he's so excited about the good news of being in Christ, that it all kind of bursts out. In fact, everything that he has written here, is just one sentence!*
- I kind of want to read it aloud in just a single breath to get a sense of Paul's excitement,
As — John Stott put it - "[Paul's] words pour out of his mouth in a continuous cascade,
neither pausing for breath nor punctuating his words..." //
- So we've got a lot to unpack.
- Being "*in Christ*", means we are:
- **Blessed Spiritually (Now);
United in the Fullness of Time;
Purposed for God's Praise; and
Sealed with the Holy Spirit.**

BLESSED SPIRITUALLY | VERSES 3-8A

영적으로 복을 받음 | 灵里蒙福

First, being in Christ means we are **blessed spiritually** — now. Verse 3...

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has **blessed** us in the heavenly realms with **every** spiritual blessing in Christ. For he *chose* us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he *predestined* us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

When Paul says that we have been blessed in the heavenly realms, he's not saying that there are blessings locked up for us out-of-reach *for later*, but it's a way of saying that for those who are *in Christ*, *there are many spiritual blessings now*.

- Not #blessed with lots of bling.
Nor I hope you're blessed as kind of a janky way of wishing someone well.
- But these are true riches made possible *as we're united with JESUS*, from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Paul is thoroughly trinitarian. /

You may have unwrapped some pretty great presents at Christmas, but nothing really compares to *the blessings that God has bestowed on us in Christ*.

- Not only *some*, but **EVERY** spiritual blessing.

- We've only got time for the headlines, so here are the three biggies:
- In Christ we have been **CHOSEN in Jesus**.
We can be chosen for all sorts of things. *Perhaps for a sporting team, a job, or even as a spouse!*
Usually, whatever you're chosen for is because you have some desirable *attributes* or *skills*.
Because there's something you can do or because there's something someone likes about you.
But God chose us *before the creation of the world! LOOONG before we ever existed*, were useful, or likeable. / That means we *can* have an incredible security in Christ, because our being chosen isn't dependent on us. It's completely God's doing.
He's chosen us to be his holy people - set apart and to live in a way pleasing to him.
- But the blessings don't stop there.
- For, in Christ we have been **PREDESTINED for adoption to sonship through Jesus**.
People can get caught up in all sorts of theological gymnastics as soon as they hear 'predestined'.
It can surface all sorts of questions about *whether or not we have free will*. /
Tim Keller said that the Bible's answer to the question: are you predestined or are you free? Is 'yes'!
But note here that Paul's emphasis is less about how we come to faith, and more what is true for those who *have responded* to God's plan for them to be saved/
- They have been adopted *in love* as sons. That was God's plan.
- In the ancient world, adoption had all of the same rights as being born into a family.
- When Paul says that we are sons, he's not being sexist.
But in that time-and-place, sons were the ones who were the legal heirs. /

- That means: We are his children. With Christ as our brother.
We are now co-heirs with him. *And brothers and sisters with one another.*

*Chosen in Jesus. Predestined for adoption through Jesus. And: **REDEEMED through his blood.***

[Verse 7] In him we have *redemption* through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us.

- God has rescued us from sin and from death.
Not because of anything we've done *or could do*, but because of everything that he's done.
- In the ancient world, a master could release a slave in at least two ways:
By adopting the slave as their child; and By paying the ransom that was owed.
- In Christ, God has done both *for us*.

The God of the universe is the one from eternity to eternity, yet he's also personally interested in us.

- Did you hear the personal language that Paul used about God's driving motivation?
It's in his sight, for his pleasure, in his love, freely given, lavished on us.
- We can chase and collect all sorts of things in life. Money, achievement, status.
But the spiritual blessings we have in Christ are given, permanent, and available *now*.
- Not, *we will be blessed*. But God has blessed — past tense — with every spiritual blessing.
- Chosen before history began; Adopted as his children; Redeemed through his blood.

UNITED IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME | VERSE 8-10

충만한 시간 속에서 연합됨 | 在时机成熟时合而为一

These are the blessings we carry into 2026 - available to us right now to enjoy. /
Second, those in Christ will be **UNITED IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME**. *Verse 8 (half way)...*

With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment —to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

God's ultimate purpose is for ALL THINGS to be united under King Jesus in the fullness of time.

- Let's break that down a bit.
- **All things on heaven and on earth** means everything seen and unseen.
When times reach their fulfillment means when Jesus returns.
Unity to all things means the renewal of everything conceivable,
under the Lordship — the Kingship — of Jesus Christ.
- When you trust in Jesus, you can of course enjoy—right now—union with God. /
There's also a unity that we share *right now* with our brothers and sisters in Christ.
That will have some bumps and imperfections, because we're still imperfect.
But Paul is pointing to the ultimate fulfillment of God's plans,
which is nothing less than the recreation of all things under the right rule of God.

- *We get an image of that in the first garden.*
- *The temple was the place where heaven and earth met.*
- But since the fall, the unity of creation, including our relationship with God, has been fractured by sin.
- We don't have to look far to see evidence for fracturing!
We see it on a universal and international scale —
everything is in decay and breaking down. [illustration]
We experience it on a relational and personal level —
fracturing of relationships and turmoil within.
- You probably experienced it at some point on Christmas day! /
- We sometimes think if we throw enough investment in *health, education, and tech*, we can solve all of the problems of the world, but at best they're pointers to a better future.
- The modern narrative is that there is no point and there is no plan,
But Paul reminds us that because of Jesus the whole world has been set on a new course.
- The goal of history, is not a mere aspiration, but a trajectory,
that has been set in motion since Jesus' death and resurrection.
- Not to throw away the world, but to redeem, restore, and reunify the world.
- And none of it is possible apart from him.
It was purposed for *in Christ. It will reach its fulfilment under Christ.*

PURPOSED FOR GOD'S PRAISE | VERSES 11-12

하나님을 찬양하기 위해 부르심 | 为赞美神而预备

- *The place where this new heaven and new earth meet is not in a building, but in a person. He's the new Temple.* And when we're in him, we're destined for that future, too.
- The church should be a foretaste of that future.

Third, in Christ we **PURPOSED for God's Praise**. Verse 11...

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

The ultimate reason that God *chose* and *predestined* us in his love, is so that we might purposefully orientate our lives to him in praise.

- You might be laying out all sorts of good plans for the year, but we should be longing that they ALL would be in *praise of God*.
- That's the goal that punctuates these fourteen verses.
Verse 6: he predestined us...*to the praise of his glorious grace*;
Verse 12: he chose us...*for the praise of his glory*;
Verse 14: he marked us with the Holy Spirit... *to the praise of his glory*.
- When we hear praise, we shouldn't only be thinking of praising God in worship.

- That God just really likes singing about him so that's the goal of all of history. No.
- Praise of course can mean when we worship God in song. At a simple level:
praise is giving honour to who God is, what he has done, and all that he has promised to do.
- We can do that in a myriad of ways.
When you love your children, *that can be in praise of God's perfect love for you.*
When you do good work, *that can be in praise of the one who gave us the gifts.*
When you deploy your resources, *that can be in praise of the one who is the ultimate giver.* /

One of the fair criticisms of AI chat bots is that they tend to be sycophantic.

That is, they tend to pour on the flattery so that you will be satisfied with the service.

The AI models have learnt that humans love praise—*be it justified or not.*

That's why when you ask a question, it might respond, "*What a brilliant question!*"

That's not God—God doesn't need our praise. He's not desperately seeking it out nor depending on it.

He knows who he is. The one who has lovingly and sacrificially lavished his grace on us.

God doesn't need reminding that he's God — he already knows that he is. / But we do.

- When Paul speaks of praise, there's something interesting going on here.
- What he has in mind, *is not only that we would proclaim God's glory with our lives,* but that the fruit of God's saving work — us — is the reality that demonstrates, not only celebrates, his glory.

- We are his praise!
- Praise exists because God has acted.
- As:
A restored cathedral is in praise of the architect.
A healed patient in praise of the surgeon. /
A recused people are in praise of the Saviour.

- When we respond in praise, when we express it, we're just catching up in recognition of reality.
- We're not singing things into existence, we're simply declaring what is true.

It's like Paul is pulling back the curtain to show us the proper order of the universe.

- That instead of us being the object of praise, we're recognising that as God is the source of all blessing, life, and love, we want to direct our all back to him.

It was such a great joy last the end of last year when two of our young members, Noah and Arlo were baptised as part of our 9:30AM service. It was extra special as their parents also reaffirmed their faith. And I love that when I asked them why is it important to reaffirm their baptismal vows, the boys mum, Liz responded. God gave everything for me, so I want to give everything to him — my whole life. //

I wonder what 2026 would look if we gave our all to him?

SEALED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT | VERSES 13-14

성령으로 인침을 받음 | 被圣灵印记

Finally, in Christ we are **sealed with the Holy Spirit**. Verse 13...

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

In the ancient world, seals were often stamped onto something, maybe with a signet ring pressed into clay or wax, for at least three reasons.

- The seal marked who something belonged to.
The seal secured whatever had been marked.
The seal guaranteed that something would be delivered.
- If you have responded to the *message of truth, the gospel of salvation, and BELIEVED*, you have been sealed with the Holy Spirit.
- You belong to him. You have been secured by him. He's guaranteed your future.
- You've been marked out as God's own — and as surely as Jesus rose from the dead, you can be certain that you are God's possession and will be carried through until that day.
- It's a future promise.
But also a present reality. / For *every Christian*.

- *There is so much false teaching around which suggests that there are two types of Christians: those with the Spirit and those without.*
- But they're simply not biblical categories.
- *It's the source of so much anguish and consternation. /*
- Hear again what Paul writes:
- **WHEN you believed:** *that's WHEN you were marked with his Holy Spirit.*
- That doesn't mean you must know the precise moment that you became a Christian, but if you are a follower of Jesus, you **have been** sealed with the Holy Spirit.
- And so, has your brother and sister in Christ. //

It's amazing to remember that as Paul writes this letter that he is imprisoned. Yet he is so excited that he barely comes up for air.

It's not because he's deluded. Or super positive. / He's relishing what it means to be in Christ.

- You have been chosen. Sonship is now yours.
You've been adopted into a new family. The penalty has been paid.
The triumph of the resurrection also belongs to you.
You've been purposed for his praise. / And you have been sealed with his Spirit.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.
