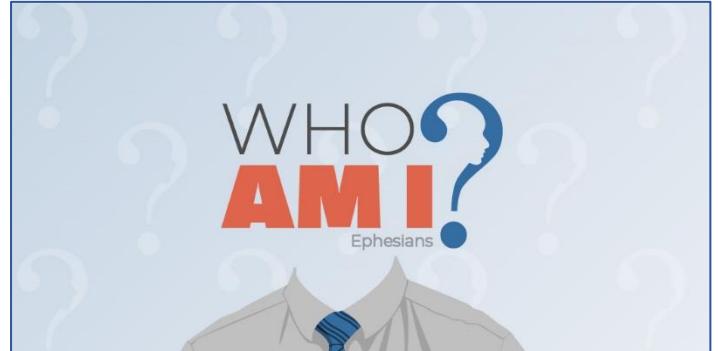




VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

How Then Shall We Live? WHO AM I? Ephesians 1:15–23 Tim Badal | January 22, 2023

Turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 1. We're in a series we started two weeks ago titled "Who Am I?" We're answering this fundamental question about our identity and how we define ourselves. Ephesians is a book that defines who we are very, very clearly. It answers the question of who we are by saying 25 different times, "I am in Christ" or "I am in Him." By saying this over and over again, it emphasizes the significance of who we are because we have bowed the knee and trusted Christ as our Savior. In this way, Paul is telling us that our relationship with Christ is far more expansive than we give it credit for.



If someone were to ask you this morning, "What does it mean to be in Christ, a follower of Jesus Christ?", you might simply say, "It's my insurance policy that keeps me from hell." If that's the totality of what you understand about your relationship with Jesus Christ, you're missing a whole lot. There's way more to that relationship than simply a liability insurance to keep you from the flames of hell. Paul will address this more as we go through Ephesians.

The second thing we need to understand is that when Paul speaks 25 times about our being in Christ, he's referring to a present reality. It involves everything you do in the present reality: how you spend your time, how you invest your money, how you engage with the people around you, how you parent, how you live out your married life, your work or school, your leisure. Everything in your life should be funneled through being in Christ. If everything in your life is not funneled through your relationship with Christ, you're not experiencing what it means to be "in Christ." Being in Christ means you wake up every morning and ask, "How do I live life in Christ today?"

In Ephesians 1:14 we saw that there is a future promise incorporated in the idea of being in Christ. Paul speaks of an inheritance that is waiting. Three times in this passage God says those who are in Christ have something to look forward to. Our Father in heaven is holding an inheritance for us, waiting for an appointed moment in the future when He has determined for us to receive it. That's pretty exciting!

In verse 18 we find a description of what this inheritance looks like. Paul says it is filled with riches and is also glorious. If you are in Christ, you have a glorious and rich inheritance on the horizon. You might be thinking, "Yay, I'm going to be rich. I've got that waiting for me, but can I have it now? Can You do a direct deposit? Here's my routing number and account number. I would like my inheritance now."

But verse 14 brings disappointment. You're excited about inheriting all the glory that comes with an eternity with God. Remember when Jesus told His disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:1-7)? You could change the word "place" to the word "inheritance." Heaven is an inheritance waiting for us. It's not the totality of that inheritance but the place where we'll receive it.

Actually, the inheritance is so great that it will take us all of eternity to unwrap it. We'll never grow tired of unwrapping it each day. That's why God said through the prophets, "No eye has seen and no ear has heard what God is preparing as an inheritance for His people" (Isaiah 64:4). We have this waiting for us and we're excited. But then we read the rest of verse 14, where it says, "...until we acquire possession of it." Wait a minute. You mean I have to wait for it? The words in this verse only take up a few centimeters

of space, but in that space is contained your entire lifetime. That's usually decades of time. That means we've been promised something wonderful, but at the same time we're told we must wait for it for an entire lifetime, until we either die or Jesus returns.

Waiting has been part of the biblical narrative since the book of Genesis. The Jewish people were continually being forced to wait. Then in the New Testament, we see how we as Christians are also waiting. In fact, the New Testament clarifies this further: we are called to patiently wait.

It's like going on a long trip with your children. At some point in that journey they become impatient and ask, "Are we there yet? Are we there yet? Are we there yet?" You tell them, "You need to be patient." God is saying to us as well, "You need to be patient." With Him a day is like a thousand years (2 Peter 3:8). So our challenge is how to use this time of waiting, how to keep ourselves busy while we wait. Paul's word to us is this: "In this season of waiting for your inheritance, Christ follower, here's what you should do."

Notice that of the 25 times he uses the phrase "in Christ" in this passage, we've already seen it eight times. For those who identify themselves as being in Christ and who are waiting on their inheritance in heaven, this is what Paul tells us to do.

First, he says we should pray. Verse 15 states, *"For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers."* What do we do until we take possession of our inheritance? We pray while we wait. The natural tendency for humans, even those who are not religious, who find themselves in a season of waiting, is that they're drawn to prayer. This happened a couple weeks ago during such a moment. During an NFL football game, a young member of the Buffalo Bills team made the tackle, stood up, then fell to the ground. It seemed like a run-of-the-mill injury, but it quickly became clear it was something very different. The emergency personnel came out on the field and the players waited. And waited. And knelt and prayed. As the wait became longer, the game was suspended, which was out of the ordinary. There was no commentary on the game. There was no talk of the implications. In fact, one sports commentator was called out because he brought up the question of the playoff implications. You don't talk about that when a guy is fighting for his life.



As Damar Hamlin lay on the ground, the only thing we as a nation could do was pray. This was seen on the Buffalo Bills' page: "Pray." In fact, they posted this moments after Damar was raced to the local hospital. Then countless Twitter feeds of NFL organizations and players—not knowing if Damar would live or die—spoke of praying for him.

It doesn't take a theologian to realize that in the waiting rooms of life, we are drawn to pray. Where do we get this? Ephesians 1 is telling us, "While you wait for your inheritance, Christian, pray." So what is our prayer? What should we be praying for? Paul distinguishes three things we need to be praying for, but in general he says we should be praying for one another, that we would be productive in our faith as we wait for our inheritance, until we take possession of it. We should pray that we will live in such a way as to bring God glory. As it says in verse one, we should seek to be known as people who are "*faithful in Christ Jesus*." Or in verse four, we pray that we would be "*holy and blameless before him*."

If we do this in our small groups, it will revolutionize our prayer time. We should start praying not so much for Uncle John's big toe, but rather praying for each other in this way: "God, I pray that Sally would be productive in her walk, that she would be holy and blameless, that she would be faithful in her relationship with Christ until You call her home." "I pray that You would be with Bill, that You would use him, that You would prove faithful by allowing him to be salt and light. I pray that Bill and his wife would be models for their children."

Paul is modeling this by telling the Ephesians that he prays for them day and night, that they would be productive in their faith. He's saying, "I pray that you would live up to the identity God has given you." He then specifies three different things that he prays for the church in Ephesus.

Paul prays that believers would engage in community.

In verse 15, he says he prays "*because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints.*" He speaks here both of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and of their love for one another. This love he's talking about is characterized by loyalty. It's not a warm fuzzy feeling, nor a romantic bond. This is a brotherhood built on their mutual faith in Christ.

There's nothing in the book of Ephesians that tells us any other reason why these people would be connected to each other. There were Jews and Greeks. There were slaves and masters. There were men and women. There were learned people and unlearned people. There were rich and poor people. From a worldly perspective, they should not have been bound together. But in Ephesian 4:4-6, we see what brought them together: "*There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.*" The thing that brought the Ephesians together wasn't that they rooted for the same football team. It wasn't that they pledged allegiance to the same country. It wasn't that they backed the same political group. The reason they were in brotherhood together was because they served the same God and followed the same Savior.

Here's the thing. For example, we have John from Ephesus, James from Ephesus, Jill from Ephesus and Jack from Ephesus. Each one is part of the church in Ephesus; each one has started following Christ. As they start making the journey closer to Jesus, what happens to them in relationship with each other? They're getting closer.

As you draw closer to Jesus Christ, you will inevitably draw closer to other believers. This is what Paul is saying in verse 15. You can't have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and not have love for one another. Show me your in-depth Bible study, then show me your love for people. If you're having an in-depth Bible study without love for people, you're probably not doing Bible study at all, because you're not getting it. You haven't figured it out. When we draw close to Jesus, when we study Who Jesus is and experience His reality, it will inevitably cause us to draw close to other believers. But here's the problem. We live in a time and place when people in our evangelical circles are saying, "Give me Jesus, but I don't need other Christians. Give me Jesus, but I don't want the church."

Dan Kimball wrote a book called *They Like Jesus But Not the Church*. The cover shows pictures of Jesus that they like, but they don't want the church. The church hurts people. It's full of hypocrites. It's no good. This movement is so big that the secular world has also written about it.

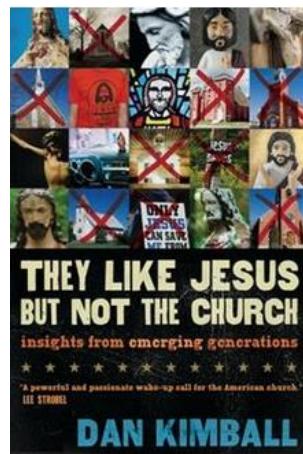
About seven or eight years ago *Newsweek* magazine wrote a cover story titled "Forget the Church; Follow Jesus." Do you see the disconnect? Paul says you can't do that. The church in Ephesus is a marvelous picture of what he's talking about.

Remember Apollos? He was an eloquent speaker. He could preach circles around anybody. He was a passionate and persuasive speaker, but he was young and had some areas that needed work. So an older couple, Aquila and Priscilla, helped disciple him in the faith. Then Paul showed up in Ephesus and stayed there three years. While he was there, many left their occultic practices and sexual debauchery to join the mission of the church. Then the apostle John also went there, as did Luke.

As I was studying this, I said to Pastor Phil, "Sundays in Ephesus must have been awesome." Can you imagine having the preacher stand up and say, "Hi, I'm John. Would you open your Bible to my Gospel, chapter four?"

Then Luke gets up and says, "Why don't you open up to my book, the book of Acts? I can tell you exactly what I meant when I wrote those verses because I was there." My goodness, these people in Ephesus had the best teachers, so they understood what it was like to have people pouring into them.

Also imagine this. Thinking back to when you first came to Christ, how far would you be in your relationship with Him right now without other people? How many of you came to know Christ because Jesus appeared to you? How many of you came to know Him because someone told you about Jesus? That's Christian community, right? You need Christian community. You would not have come to know Jesus without someone telling you about Him. That's why Paul says, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news" (Romans 10:15). If we need people to get us into a relationship with Christ, surely we also need people to keep



us in that relationship, to keep us grounded and saturated in Christ. I'm not saying that people keep you saved. Christ saves you and keeps you saved; He alone will get you to heaven. But God has purposed that people are the way we're going to stay grounded in the faith.

So the question we have to ask this morning is: am I in Christian community? Let's look at four quick tests to consider about Christian community.

We just went through a pandemic and everything I read that's coming from pastors right now is that Christian community is at an all-time low. People aren't going to church like they used to. People aren't involved in small groups like they used to be. People aren't engaged in ministry like they used to be. I'm thankful that in each of these contexts, Village Bible Church does not follow those trends. Still, we're not immune to these things. So here are the four tests.

The closeness test

Not counting your spouse, are there Christians around you who know you? I mean, really know you? They know what makes you tick. They know about your faith. They know your testimony, your spiritual victories, your spiritual failures. They know your temptations and struggles. They know enough about you that the slightest shift in you brings them to ask, "Is everything okay? Are you doing alright? We need to talk."

These are the people in your life at whom you get furious inside when they ask those questions. You try to find a way to say, "Things are okay. I'm okay. Yeah, I'm good." You hope you look convincing. You get in the car, thinking, "How do they know?" It's because they've been around you for a long time.

You see, some of us won't let people get that close. Here's the thing. I don't think you can say to people, "I'm not going to let you get that close," but then say to Jesus, "I'll let You get that close." If you're holding people at arm's length and saying, "I'm introverted with people, but with Jesus I'm not"—I just don't see it. Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe you can come up with a ten-page paper, single-spaced, on why you think I'm wrong. Send it to me. But I just don't see it. I think some of us right now hold everybody—including our Lord and Savior—at arm's length. If that's true of you, you're not going to experience what it is to be in Christ.

Where are you at in the closeness test? You may be surrounded by people, but nobody really knows who you are. Nobody really knows what's going on in your life. Listen to me. Some of the most isolated and lonely people I know are pastors and they're around people all the time.

The conversation test

Just because you're in a group of Christians and you're talking doesn't mean it is a biblical community. I have been part of small groups that talk about a lot of things, yet Christ is never mentioned. You can be with another Christian but never talk about Christian things; you're just two people talking. That's okay, but it's not Christian community. It's not what Paul is talking about. It's not getting you closer to Christ. It's not preparing you to receive your inheritance. We've got to be careful.

If you've been around me very long, you know I'm not saying we should all be speaking in King James language. "How sanctified are you feeling this morning?" "Verily, verily... Very sanctified. Almost glorified. Glory to God. Blessings from heaven. Brother, I pray for you and beseech the Lord...." Beseech is a good word, but I don't know what it means. I wouldn't want to be part of that small group. If you're doing that, don't invite me, because I won't know what you're talking about.

When Christians get together, their conversation needs to be about everything, but your faith should always intersect with life. At some point life has to intersect your relationship with Christ. Why? Because if you're really in Christ, then when you talk about the kids, Christ should be in the conversation. When you talk about work, Christ has got to be in it. When you talk about what you're watching on TV, Christ has got to be in it. If everything you do is devoid of Christ, then the question you need to ask is, "Am I really in Christ?" How can I go through a whole conversation with people who say they're Christians but not have talked about Jesus?

Listen, I'm not talking about quick conversations with just two-minutes to catch up. But if you spend a whole evening together and nothing comes up about Jesus, that's a problem. If after the small group leader has forced you to talk through the Bible study time and during the fellowship time there is nothing spiritual mentioned, that's a problem. If you have to be forced to talk about the Lord, are you actually in Christ? That's a question you need to ask yourself. Is faith intersecting your life?

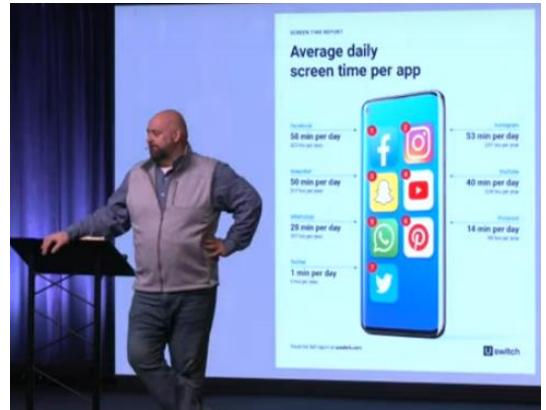
"How is work going?" "It's been great. We've had record sales. God has been so gracious. I am selling the socks off of last year's numbers. You know what I need? I need humility, because I'm starting to buy my own press but I need to be careful. Would you pray for me, that I would not lose my humility, that I would give thanks to God and praise Him for this provision?" That's faith intersecting with life. That doesn't sound too King Jamish, does it? "Verily, verily"? No, it's faith intersecting with life.

The calendar test

What about your calendar? Are you making time for Christian community? We have 168 hours in a week. You have had 168 hours in a week since you were born. Humanity has had 168 hours in a week since everything began. I'm reading a biography on Martin Luther. He had 168 hours in his week. Martin Luther got more done by the crack of dawn than I do in a day, without a car, without a phone, without electricity. Yet I think I'm the advanced one.

So listen. We've got all this time—168 hours—and the number one thing I hear from people—and I find myself saying it as well—is this: "Hey, how are things going?" "Busy. Busy. Busy. 168 hours—they're gone like that." What are we busy doing? Let me show you a graph. I know none of you are doing this, but let's just consider here. What are we doing with 168 hours?

- Six hours of our day are spent watching TV. (I know. None of you are watching TV. That's why Netflix and Hulu can't make a profit. I know.) So six hours a day, a quarter of our day is spent watching TV.
- Two hours is spent on social media.
- Six hours of time is using the internet. Now, I think some of that time is for work and school, so we'll give you a pass on that one. Let's just say that somewhere in the neighborhood of eight hours a day are spent watching TV or being on social media.
- Eight hours in technology. To break that down further, one hour we're on Facebook, just scrolling. (I know, you don't have Facebook, so you're not doing that. Facebook only has something like four users.)
- Then Snapchat—50 minutes. That's a lot of ceiling tile pictures looking up kids' noses. Have you noticed how all Snapchat pictures are looking up kids' noses? That's a lot of pictures.
- YouTube videos—40 minutes.
- Twitter. One minute a day. I don't even know how that works. If you're on Twitter, God bless you. You're a holy person. One minute a day.



I get it. Right away you're all saying, "Well, that's not me." I don't know who it is, then. It's somebody. But here's what we compete with. During 168 hours a week, you spend about one hour here at church. Two hours at small group. That's three hours. Let's carve out two more hours, let's say doing something with another Christian. That's five hours. Five hours out of 168.

Five hours a week is almost the equivalent of the amount of time the average American watches TV in a day—and we think we're going to impact the cause of Christ and impact our relationship of being in Christ in a powerful way? We're not. We wonder why we're sad. We wonder why we're not impacting the world. We wonder why we're lethargic and not accomplishing things. We wonder why we read this Book and say, "Why isn't this stuff happening to us?" Why? Because we give a couple hours a week to this. What does Acts 2 say? They spent time in each others' houses daily. They couldn't get enough of one another.

The checkbook test

Finally, what about your checkbook? How are you using money to invest in other people's faith? Now, giving to the church is one way you can do that. You give money to Village Bible Church, then Vacation Bible School will impact 300+ kids. You're doing that now. That's a good thing. But let me ask you a more personal question. Do you have a hospitality account? Do you set aside part of your budget to simply bless other believers? Are you going to have people over and minister to them.

Max Lucado, a pastor in Texas, said this: "Never have we ever lived in homes so big that we never use." We live in mansions. Our rooms are so expansive that we've had to add an adjective, calling them great rooms. But then we don't invite anybody over to

them. We used to have rooms just for entertaining. We called them parlors. It was a place for people to sit and visit. But we don't have those anymore.

There are a handful of reasons for this. One, we're busy. Second, we think we have to put on a show where everything is clean and perfect. I recently saw a meme that said we need conversations around the table more than we need the Pinterest-laden table, the perfect dinners and the coordinating home décor.

Listen, our world is falling apart. We have more people who need counseling than we have therapists. People are broken, yet we're just sitting in front of our TVs watching fake people with fake lives, thinking they have the answer. They don't. Here we are, as Christians, letting the world define us but it is not working. Christ has given us the greatest treasure and we're holding it for ourselves. The early church had it right; they invested in one another. How are you doing with these tests?

Paul prays that believers would experience Christ.

Well, I've blown through my time with my first point, so let's get to the second point. First, we need to pray for one another, that we would experience and engage in community. Then number two, we need to experience Christ. Paul continues by saying, "As you wait for your inheritance, don't sit idly by. Dig deep into Christ."

Notice what he prays in verses 17-18, "...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened." Underline that word "enlightened." It's the Greek word *photizo*. It's where we get the word photo from. Paul is essentially saying God has a photo of you. He wants you to get a better grasp of His photo of you. He wants you to look deeply into His photo of you—His view of you.

When I read that, it caused me to harken back to a conversation I had with a father of a teenage daughter in this church. I got called to the house. The father said, "Pastor, I need to talk with you." I sat at his table and he started to cry big tears, the kind only the father of a teenage daughter could cry. He said, "My daughter hates herself. She thinks she's ugly and fat. She thinks she's worth nothing. She thinks she has nothing of value to give to this world. She thinks she's a waste of space." He just kept going on and on and on, with more tears running down his face. Then all of a sudden he started pounding the table. He said, "If she could only see what I see. She's beautiful! She's intelligent! She's creative! She has a sense of humor. If she could only see what I see."

This text is telling us that God our Father in heaven is saying to you and me, "If you could only see what I see." He's crying out from heaven, saying, "I have a photo of you. Can you not see it?" It's like that poor teenage girl who was buying into the lies of the devil and the world, instead of believing the truths from her Father in heaven. She didn't realize that she was the daughter of the most high God Who created her as the beautiful, intelligent and creative woman she is, that she is loved by her family. Instead of believing those truths, she had allowed herself to believe a lie. And listen, she's not the only one. Even her pastor from time to time falls prey to those lies. There are a great many of us right now who have bought into the photo the world is showing us, instead of the photo God is showing us.

When we are in Christ, we are reminded how much God loves us. We know this because of all Christ did for you and me. We experience Christ when we dig into His Word, asking Him, "Would You enlighten me?" As I sat across the table from this father—this brother—I prayed, "God, would You open her eyes to see what You see?"

I pray that for you as well. I pray that you would pray that for one another. "God, would You open our eyes, so that our hearts may be enlightened and that we would experience Jesus?"

Paul prays that believers would expand their faith within God's control.

Finally, Paul prays that we would expand our faith, knowing that God is in control. As we wait for this inheritance, there are a lot of bad things happening in this world. There are struggles, both personal and global, and we wonder, "Does God have this all figured out? Has He got it taken care of? Is everything going to be okay?" We wonder, "Is God still on His throne?"

Paul says, "I know that while you're waiting for your glorious and rich inheritance that you're wondering if God has it all figured out. I want you to know that He is in control." Verse 21 tells us that Christ sits "*far above all rule and authority and power and*

dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come." Verse 22 tells us that God "put all things under his feet." We need to be settled in that. Everything is going to be okay and here's why. The reason you and I can know that God is in control is because Jesus trusted that. Verse 19 speaks of the "*immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead.*" Jesus put trust in the Father.

The second Person of the Trinity—Jesus, the God-Man—went to the cross and allowed Himself to die and be put in the grave. He put His life in the hands of the heavenly Father, and what did the Father do on the third day? He raised Him from the dead. He proved Himself to be completely trustworthy. If God the Father can do that in Christ, what personal issue, struggle, ailment or calamity that you're facing today is bigger than the Son of God going to the tomb? Trust Him. Rely on Him. Rest in Him. This is the sovereignty of God. This is the pillow on which you can lay your head. When anxiety fills your heart, remember that if God could raise His Son from the dead, then He can handle whatever concerns me today.

While we wait for our inheritance, we engage in Christian community, we expand our faith in God's control and we experience Christ to His fullness. Then and only then will we know who we are. Then and only then will we be able to fight the lies the devil and this world try to throw our way. Amen?

Village Bible Church | 847 North State Route 47, Sugar Grove, IL 60554 | (630) 466-7198 | www.villagebible.org/sugar-grove

All Scriptures quoted directly from English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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