



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Our Before-and-After Story

WHO AM I?

Ephesians 2:4–10

Tim Badal | February 5, 2023



Please turn in your Bibles to the book of Ephesians. We'll be in Ephesians 2 this morning. For the next couple of months we'll be looking at this age-old question: who am I? We've been

learning how we, as Christ followers, can understand that through Christ, we have a new identity that reorders, restructures, reorients and redefines everything about our identity. No longer do we need to live like the world by defining ourselves by our status, the stuff we have, our skin color, our sexual orientation or the struggles we face. Instead, because of Christ, we now can identify ourselves by our Savior and the salvation we have in Him. It's because of Christ that we now have a foundation and standing that establishes our worldview, our self-image and our outlook on life. Who am I is a three-word question that you and I must be able to answer.

If we don't know who we are, then the culture of this world will have us all worked up, questioning everything about ourselves. As a result we'll go down all manner of bunny trails, looking for things that are ultimately lies. But God, in His grace and goodness, has given us the book of Ephesians so we can know who we are because He has established our true identity in Christ. Through the first three chapters of Ephesians we can come to understand who are. Then in chapters four through six, based on what we learned in the first three chapters, we are taught how we are to live in light of this truth. Because of who we are in Christ, it tells us how we are to live as married people, as single people, as parents and children, as employers and employees. It helps us understand how we ought to live in the good times and the bad times, how we ought to live as citizens, and how we ought to live with our enemies and with those we love. If we don't know who we are, then we'll have no idea how we ought to live in all of life's circumstances and we'll inevitably find ourselves lost at every turn.

So this morning, once again, we're picking up this textbook to remind ourselves of what Christ says He has done for us and who we are in Him. If you were with us last week, we had a very difficult passage of Scripture to deal with—not so much because it was hard to understand, but because of what it said about us. It said things that quite frankly we didn't want to believe. We were reminded that God knows much more about ourselves than we do, like the fact that we were dead in our trespasses and sin. I'm going to pick up where we started last week, because we need to hear the bad news again. Without the bad news, the good news isn't going to seem good at all.

Let's look at Ephesians 2:1–10. This will be our prelude to our time around the Lord's Table in communion this morning.

¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

What an amazing passage of Scripture! We have before us what I would like to call a before-and-after story. It's a story of transformation. If we're honest, we love this kind of story, where we're told about what happens before something and then what happened after. We love before-and-after stories and pictures.

We'll use a house as an example. There's something about seeing a house that is run down and out of date, then having an architect redesign it and a carpenter turn that same house into something beautiful. Whether it's our own home or a home on the Home and Garden network, there's something wonderful about seeing something old being transformed into something new.

Let's think not only of something inanimate going from old to new; let's talk about our own bodies. There's something about watching a friend, or maybe even a celebrity, go through a body transformation. Maybe it's someone close to us, so we've been able to watch the change happen little by little. Maybe then they'll post on Facebook, "I've been on this journey" and they include before-and-after pictures. "I've lost this amount of weight." Then it dawns on you how major that transformation has been for them. They're a different person. What often happens with us is that when we see these pictures, we are eager to know their secret. What did they do to get where they are now?

There are even more dramatic stories than those of a house or a person's weight loss success. Sometimes it's the before-and-after that involves a struggle like an addiction. Someone you know, or even are living with, has struggled with drugs or alcohol and it's destroying their lives. It's evident in their physical appearance and actions. It may have gone on for years and eroded the very essence of who they are. Maybe because of these consequences, they finally came to the end of themselves. Maybe through the help of others, through therapy or through a multi-step plan, they've finally gotten a handle on their addiction. Then little by little, day by day, decision by decision, they have gradually gotten sober and their lives have changed. This then becomes their story.

A close friend of mine who is now in the pastorate showed me a picture of himself when he was involved in drugs before he was saved. When that picture is compared with what he looks like now, as a pastor of a large church in Tennessee, you can't even believe he's the same person.

We can be mesmerized by before-and-after pictures, because they clearly demonstrate that transformation is possible. We can see with our own eyes that something momentous has changed. The old has gone and the new has come. In our text today, Ephesians 2:1-10, we have a before-and-after event before our eyes that hinges on two words. You might expect those two words to be theologically deep; so deep, in fact, that you would need a seminary degree to understand them. You would have to know the original Greek language in order to plumb the depth of these words. At the beginning of verse four are two of the most significant words in the entire Bible. These two words are the hinge upon which our transformation takes place. These words are simply this: "But God."

In verses one through three, it's all bad news. From verses four through ten, it's all good news. The hinge between bad news and good news—before Christ and after Christ—are these two words: But God. You are either on one side of those words or on the other side. That's where you're going to find your identity: either in verses one through three, or in verses four through ten.

Where you are in this passage radically determines how you experience life, both in the here and now and also in the rest of eternity. So as we look at this before-and-after story, I want you to figure out where you are in it and how you're experiencing it to its fullest.

This before-and-after story helps remind us how things started.

We won't spend a lot of time here, but in order to tell the whole story, we need to review what we learned last week. In the first verses of chapter two, we saw that things are very bad for us in the "before" story. It's dark and depressing when we look at what our lives were like before Christ.

¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

It's all bad. There's nothing good here. Let's review three things we see in these verses.

We had total spiritual inability.

First, Paul declares that before Christ, we live in total spiritual inability. We are dead. When you're dead, you can't do anything. Nothing. God has to do the work. Picture in your mind Lazarus in John 11. He was dead, so he could not do anything until after Jesus called him out of the grave. If we're going to do anything, Paul says we must be made alive in Christ. We can't do anything; we're as dead as a doornail.

We had total spiritual depravity.

This doesn't mean we were as bad as we possibly could have been or as bad as everyone else. When you hear about depravity, your first thought is probably, "I'm not as bad as I could be. I'm not the worst person I know." Yes, there are Hitlers, Stalins and other terrible people in this world who are worse off than you are, but that's not the issue. Theologically, the idea of total depravity means there's nothing in us that is not impacted by the cancer of sin we described last week. It touches every part of us. It's not like you have a good part and a bad part; every part is bad.

We had total spiritual sinful proclivity.

We have spiritual inability, we have spiritual depravity, and third, we had a spiritual sinful proclivity. Our depravity causes us to be led by the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of our bodies and minds. We have this inclination, this proclivity, this impulse within us that is always going to make sin more attractive. We're always going to have this draw to sin that is more powerful than holiness.

Remember, what I'm describing is who we are before we come to Christ. In our lost state, the draw to unrighteousness, the temptation to rebel against God, will always be stronger than the draw to follow God. Why? Because we have spiritual inability, we're totally depraved, and we have a proclivity to sin.

Because of this, we go around in this world in rebellion against God. As a result, verse three says, we are by nature children of God's wrath. Paul says, in the corresponding passage of Romans 1, that as a result of our sin, we are rebellious haters of God. We invent evil, we exchange the truth for a lie and we claim to be wise while actually being fools. Because of these things, God's wrath is revealed against all ungodliness and wickedness.

God has given us this repeating theme throughout the Scriptures because it's been going on since the dawn of humanity. Men sin, then God's wrath comes. Men sin, then God's wrath comes. Yet within this cycle there is also a season of God's longsuffering, grace, mercy and love.

Don't ever think God is simply a vengeful God in the Old Testament, only responding to sin with wrath. Rather, God is giving us pictures of what He's also doing now. Look for example at Noah. The Bible says in Genesis 6:5 that God looked at mankind and saw that every inclination of man's heart was to do evil. It says He was saddened that He had created man, so He purposed to bring a destructive flood. But then we read that God found favor with Noah. That's where we see His love and mercy, but it wasn't just directed toward Noah; it was actually directed toward all humanity. Noah spent 120 years building the ark and the whole time he was preaching repentance. God was giving the other people an opportunity to repent, but they didn't.

Let's look at another example of God's wrath: Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham preached to Sodom and Gomorrah, but they didn't listen and God's wrath came on them. Or look at Egypt when Moses preached to Pharaoh, saying, "Let My people go; the plagues are coming." One plague came. Moses warns him again. Another plague came; Pharaoh still didn't listen. God gave him opportunity after opportunity, until eventually the firstborn sons were killed.

Jericho is another story of God's wrath. How many days did God have His people walk around the city? Seven days. Then on the seventh day, they walked seven times around the city. The people of Jericho could have said, "Okay. We give up." But they didn't and the walls tumbled down.

With every story of God's wrath there's always an opportunity during the time of God's patient love for the sinners to repent. When it happens that the people do repent, God relents. We also see this in the story of Jonah. Nineveh was about to be destroyed, but God sent Jonah to warn them. He preached an eight-word sermon: "Repent or I'm going to destroy Nineveh." They said, "Good enough for us! We give up." Even though Jonah hated the Ninevites, God relented and they lived happily ever after. So don't get the idea that God is always just a wrathful, vengeful God.

Our sound guy is saying, "This is nothing like the sermon I've heard twice this morning." Here's why. I was confronted in the parking lot earlier when someone said to me rather angrily, "I don't get how this works. If God is just a God of wrath, how can He be a God of love?" I said, "Tune in on the next broadcast." Yes, God is a God of wrath, but He extends His love again and again. He gives opportunity after opportunity for repentance. Right now we're in the season of God's opportunity. If you turn from Ephesians to Revelation, you'll see a lot of wrath coming. There are trumpets and bowls of wrath. Wrath, wrath, wrath. But God is saying to us, "Now is the time: repent, repent, repent. I'm here at the door and am knocking. Now is the time."

In His grace, mercy and love, God is warning us. Then when that wrath comes, whose fault will it be if you're not ready? Is it God's fault? No. He has warned us. He's given us opportunity. The writing is on the wall: "My wrath is coming!" So if you find yourself in verses one through three, and you can hear my voice today, stop and believe in what God has been saying to you today.

This before-and-after story helps us recognize all that God did in salvation.

What's happening between now and the wrath that is to come is: "But God." In this moment, God has done something. We can either experience His wrath or we have the opportunity for good news. God has provided an alternative. Look again at our passage today:

⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

We are not guaranteed this offer will still be here tomorrow. We don't know when His wrath will come. No one knows the hour or the day. But in this moment, grace is being extended to us. Right now, God is looking at us and saying with love and mercy, "I want to offer you salvation."

Here's what is so amazing. When we look at verses one through three, we see that you and I are standing before God, exposed in our sin. In many ways, we're standing naked and in shame. God knows our sin and shame better than our spouse does, better than our parents or children do, better than our best friends do. He knows everything we've done, both publicly and privately. He knows what we've shared with people and what we haven't. While many of the people around us would leave us in a heartbeat if they knew what was on our sin docket, God is saying, "I'm getting close and putting My arm around you. I love you and am extending My mercy to you." Notice verses four and seven speak of how God is "rich" in this mercy and grace. The word "rich" is a banking term in the original language. The idea is that we are rich in sin and rich in our trespasses. In banking terms, you are rich in debits. You are rich in withdrawals. The problem is you have no credits. So like most teenagers these days, you're overdrawn.

God is saying, "You're overdrawn spiritually and people like you deserve hell." But through the salvation He offers, because of what Christ has done, He can take your overdrawn account and link it to His heavenly account. In other words, He's provided overdraft protection.

Essentially He's saying, "Whenever you overdraw because of your sin, it's covered through Christ." When God the Judge looks at your account, because of Christ, you have the riches of heaven. You're a millionaire ten times over. You may not feel like it; the devil may make you feel as though you're a pauper. Because you're in Christ, you have the immeasurable riches of His glory behind you, only made possible because of what Christ has done.

So before you start thinking you're something, notice when this transaction happened. Verse five says it took place "*even when we were dead in our trespasses...*" I might think, "Of course I'm an important guy. I preach three sermons on Sunday. I teach theology on Sunday night. I write small group curricula. I'm a multi-site church pastor. Yeah, God picked a good one. I'm glad He took me in the third round." No. God picked me when I was dead in my trespasses and sin. I offered nothing. I was millions of dollars in debt because of my sin and have nothing to brag about. The only thing I can brag about is my Savior. That's the only thing I've got. He's the only thing I bring to the table. The only thing I bring to my salvation is my sin.

Notice what Jesus does: He makes me alive! Then notice what it says in verse five: We are made alive "*together with Christ.*" God connects us with Christ, then He "*raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places.*" This is really important. Essentially Paul is saying, "Whatever God did for Jesus, take it to the bank that He's going to do it for you."

God raised Jesus Christ from the dead; we read about that back in Ephesians 1. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is what raises us from spiritual death to spiritual life.

Then God raised Jesus from the earth to the heavenly realms 40 days later. We now celebrate the ascension of Jesus. Just as Jesus was raised from the grave to life and just as He was raised from the earth to heaven, so we too will follow our older Brother. We have been raised from death to life and one day we will be raised to the heavenly places. You might be thinking, "I'm not sure I believe that." If you can believe that Jesus is at the right hand of the Father, then I'm telling you, you've got a place waiting for you in heaven. What you have waiting for you in heaven are the *"immeasurable riches of his grace."*

We sometimes go to Olive Garden—Luke's favorite restaurant—where they give you this little black pager. The most happy moment of Luke's life is when that things starts lighting up and buzzing. The next important thing in our lives will be the moment when that spiritual buzzer goes off, then as the rock group says, "You ain't seen nothing yet." Some of us need to hear that this morning. This life is hard. It's beat us up and spits us out. But when you're in Christ, you haven't seen anything yet. God has something on the horizon waiting for us and the only question is: how do I get it? Some of you are sitting in verses one through three, "I want that. Pastor, get to that part. I'm still in verses one through three."

You get it by faith: *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast"* (Ephesians 2:8–9). This gift of salvation is all God's doing, but we gain it through faith. We can't get it by going to church. We can't get it by being baptized. We can't get it through taking communion. No pastor can bestow it on us. We only gain salvation through the finished work of Jesus on the cross. We receive this gift by believing, by saying, "I believe I'm dead in my trespasses and sin. I believe what You say about me, God. I believe I cannot fix it on my own, so I believe Jesus came to fix it for me on the cross of Calvary. I believe what He did will not only fix what happened in my past, but He has the power to address the things in my present, and that He has everything I need for the future."

This before-and-after story helps us respond by showcasing His grace.

When you get to the point where you can say, "I believe these things so much that I will reorder my life so I will live in light of it," then you will be living in Christ. This is what turns your story from being a "before" story to the start of an "after" story. We then respond to what God has done in us by showcasing what God has done, by showcasing His grace.

How do we do this? Verse ten says, *"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."* Good works don't save us, but what they do is tell people that we have been transformed.

Now as we move to a time of communion, let me ask where are you in this story? If you're still in the "before" part of the story, it's time for you to believe before it's too late. In this season where God's grace is offered, believe. If you're in the "after" part of the story and you've experienced God's grace, how are you showing His workmanship of that grace in your life? What good is it for you to go to work this week and say you're a believer, but then you're still talking and acting like you're in the "before" part of your life? Are you still living in the "before" part in your marriage and parenting? Do you treat people like you did before Christ?

Communion reminds us that once we are in Christ, everything changes. The chains that once bound us are gone. We've been set free. Communion moves us to ask ourselves, "What things from my past do I need to let go of?" The great thing about communion is that it reminds us of the price that was paid, the sacrifice that was made that allows us to leave our past and move into a future of forgiveness and grace.

The wonderful thing is that this forgiveness, grace, love, and mercy we found the first time we sought Christ are still available today. It wasn't just there the first time you failed; it's there the millionth time you fail. So in this moment, would you seek God's face, asking for His love and forgiveness, either for the first time or for the thousandth time? Allow the Holy Spirit to shower you with the richness of His love and mercy. Commit to Him that yours will be the best before-and-after story, so you will showcase His grace to the best of your ability to the people in your life.