



A DEATH TO LIFE EXPERIENCE

INTRODUCTION

Ephesians 2:4-10

Some years ago as a youth pastor I hiked with some of my high schoolers to the top of Mt. Whitney in California, the highest spot in the continental United States (14,495 feet). We exulted over the wonderful panorama of the Sierra Nevadas and the Mojave Desert. What a spot, with its rarefied, crystal-clear air, its indigo and turquoise lakes—vista giving way to vista as far as one could see. As we gazed together from what seemed to be the top of the world, one of our party pointed out that only eighty miles to the southeast was Death Valley, the lowest spot in the United States at 280 feet below sea level and the hottest place in the country with a record 134 degrees in the shade!

What a contrast! One place is the top of the world, the other the bottom. One place is perpetually cool, the other relentlessly hot. From Mt. Whitney you look down on all of life. From Death Valley you can only look up to the rest of the world.

In Ephesians 2 Paul takes us down to the Death Valley of the Soul (vv. 1-3) and then up to “the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (vv. 4-7). His method is contrast: from death to life, from Hell to Heaven, from bondage to freedom, from pessimism to optimism. The journey’s contrast will enhance our appreciation for what we have in Christ and will influence the way we live.¹

OPEN IT

1. Do you own anything that was handmade? What can you say about the workmanship of the item?

READ IT

Ephesians 2:4-10

¹ Hughes, Kent. Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ (Preaching the Word). From Death to Life. 2013.

EXPLORE IT

2. What drove God to make Christians alive? (v. 4)
3. Into what tragic state is each person born? (v. 5)
4. Why did God raise us up and seat us with Christ? (v. 7)
5. Who can boast about saving themselves? (v. 9)
6. What were we handcrafted by God to do along the journey of the Christian life? (v. 10)

APPLY IT

We Were in Bad Shape

The starting place of Christian belief is our recognition that we are spiritually dead before God. This death entered mankind at the disobedience of Adam (Gen. 3:8; Hos. 6:7; Rom. 5:12). Although great humanitarian and philanthropic efforts often mask mankind's depravity, all people lack the spiritual and moral ability to please God. Instead of seeking after God, every man's natural inclination follows the working of Satan and base appetites that are contrary to God's will. Therefore, as Paul concludes in a metaphor of fatherly discipline, by nature all people stand in jeopardy of God's eternal wrath.²

7. Read Exodus 34:6-7 and write down one attribute of God's lovingkindness and why it's meaningful to you.

² Redmond, Eric C. Knowing the Bible: Ephesians. Crossway.

God Loved Us Anyway

The God of all creation is full of mercy, love, and grace. Given the pervasiveness of sin and the prevalence of evil among all of the peoples of the world, one could not blame God for wiping out the entirety of his creation in a furious display of his powerful wrath at sin. But this is not the full picture of the character of our God. Although angry at sin and transgression, he is also rich in mercy, full of love, abounding in grace, and possessing a heart of kindness. In Christ Jesus, he made a way of escape from the compelling influence of the forces of evil and has bestowed new life upon us. This is entirely a gift of his grace rooted in his kindness. Because of our deadness and bondage to sin, there is no initiative, merit, or effort on our part to acquire this precious gift. It is simply received by faith.³

8. What are some ways you've seen people try to feel alive apart from God?

9. If God has made us alive, how should the people of our church enjoy the true life we have in Christ? Is it important to feel alive, or just to know we're born again?

³ Arnold, Clinton E. Ephesians. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Zondervan Academic. 2010.

We've Been Saved by Grace through Faith

What is the nature of this faith that Paul speaks of in connection with salvation? In Rom 10:9, Paul makes it clear that it is a heart response to hearing the content of the message of the gospel: "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." In this respect, it is an accepting response to God's revelation about himself through Jesus Christ. This includes an acknowledgment of who Jesus is, an admission of one's sinfulness, and a recognition of Jesus' work on the cross (his atoning death and resurrection).⁴

10. How would you rate your desire for sound theology on a scale of 1 to 10? If you're not satisfied with that number, what's one way you can grow in your theological understanding of God?

11. Paul uses the phrase "by grace you have been saved" once in verse 5 and once in verse 8. What might happen if a person fails to understand this foundational truth?

12. Tomorrow morning when you wake up, what theological truth from these seven verses can encourage you to live a vibrant Christian life? (BONUS: Set a reminder of that truth for yourself for the morning!)

⁴ Ibid.

We've Not Earned Anything

Because we were dead in our sins, God had to first bring us to life before we could come to Christ for forgiveness. When Paul says that God "made us alive," he refers to the regeneration - or new birth - that God gives us. It is this new life that enables us to come to Christ in faith. Thus, even faith itself is a gift from God.

Our salvation is, from start to finish, all of grace (Eph. 2:5, 8-9). Though we have done nothing to deserve his mercy or love, God lavishes these things on us nonetheless. Let us rejoice, then, in "the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (v. 7)!⁵

13. Is there anything we can boast about as believers? If so, what?

14. What's the difference between trying to earn your salvation with good works and trying to worship God with your good works? Do you have any Scriptural support for your answer?

15. How would you explain the grace of God to a devout person from another faith system who is working hard to measure up?

⁵ Allen, Erika. ESV Women's Study Bible, From Death to Life. Crossway. 2020.

Handcrafted for Good Works

God saved you for his purposes and pleasure. Many Christians are unfulfilled and miserable because they've never gotten around to the work God has for them. When you understand the grace with which God saved you, gratitude will drive your response to it. The purpose for your life has already been designed. You don't have to come up with it. God prepared ahead of time for us to do good works. He will give you the desire for them and the ability to pull them off, but you must live them out. Remember, the canvas does not dictate to the painter; the painter dictates to the canvas.⁶

16. If you are God's workmanship, what are some ways you've been cooperative with His design for your life? Can you think of any ways you're not being cooperative?

17. Walking in the good works God has planned for us sometimes looks like baby steps! What's one next step you believe God is calling you to this week?

⁶ Evans, Tony. The Tony Evans Bible Commentary. United States, B&H Publishing Group, 2019.

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