

N.T. WRIGHT

THE  
VISION  
OF  
EPHESIANS

THE TASK OF THE CHURCH  
AND THE GLORY OF GOD

# EPHESIANS

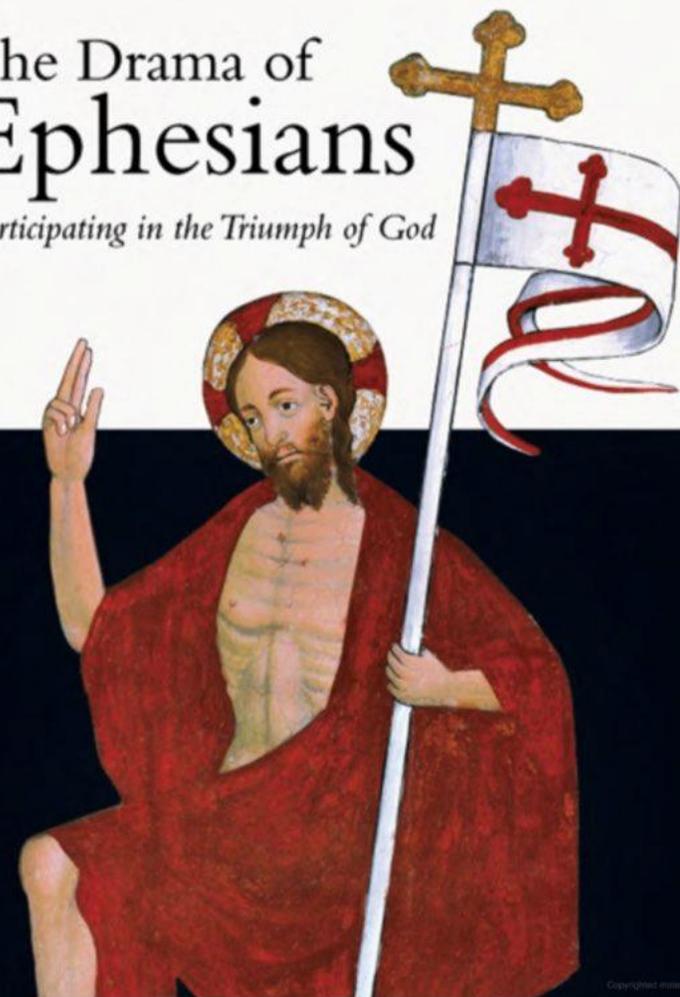
Lynn H. Cohick

NCCS  New Covenant Commentary Series

Timothy G. Gombis

## The Drama of Ephesians

*Participating in the Triumph of God*



# Ephesians Resources



Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will:

To the faithful saints in Christ Jesus at  
Ephesus.

<sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our  
Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

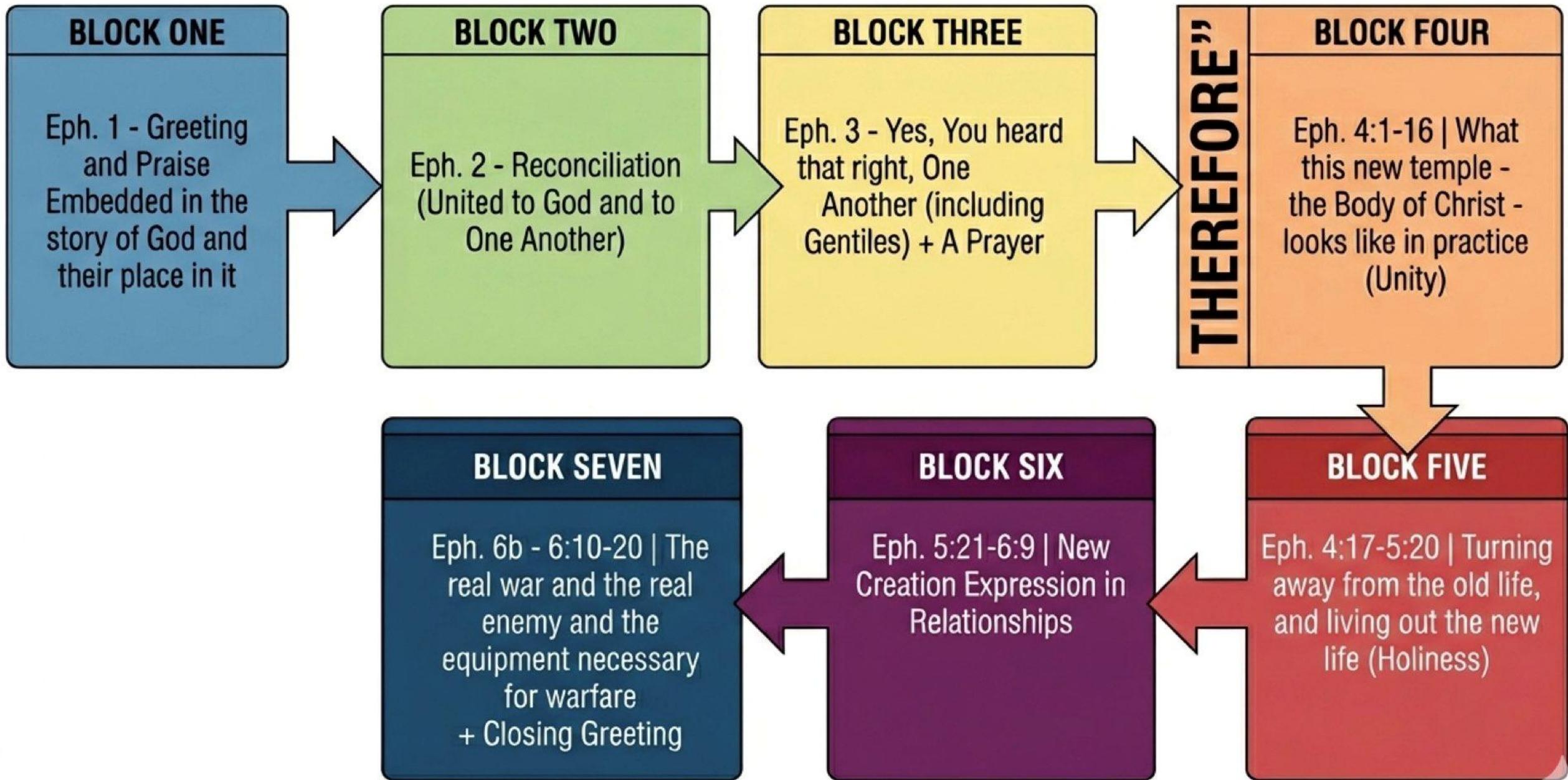
Ephesians 1:1-2

“We need a lifelong immersion in the texts of the Scriptures - soaking ourselves in the language so that when we put down our Bibles we can improvise living out that language in whatever we encounter.”

- Marva Dawn

“Ephesians is not a doctrinal treatise in the scholastic sense of that term. It is, rather, a drama in which Paul portrays the powerful, reality-altering, cosmos-transforming acts of God in Christ to redeem God's world and save God's people for the glory of his name.”

Timothy Gombis, PhD. (*The Drama of Ephesians*)



# Themes to look out for:

1. Dwelling / Temple / Fulness (Fill)
2. Bringing Together / Reconciliation  
(God and Us, Jew/Gentile)
3. Love
4. Darkness
5. Prayer

# Challenge:

Read Ephesians EVERY DAY

Read Ephesians in one sitting

Memorize Ephesians ch. 1 (particularly 20-23)

# The Story from a 30,000-Foot View

Dismiss Kids

Announcements:

1. Set up - IT IS FUN! JOIN US IN THE FUN! Hospitality team (build it up)

Series Intro:

1. We are, as a community, going to walk through the book of Ephesians for the next nine weeks.
2. Now, Ephesians is a book we could spend nine years going through slowly, turning over every rock and examining in detail every line.
3. Nine weeks is a long time, but it only whets the palate for this remarkable letter.
4. Before we dive in, I want to talk briefly about sources and resources [Cite Sources + Ephesians Resource Document]
  - a. **SLIDE** - Sources
    - i. The Vision of Ephesians - N.T. Wright
    - ii. Lynn Cohick commentary on Ephesians
    - iii. The Drama of Ephesians - Timothy Gombis
      1. I'll draw from other sources, but if you want to go deeper, I'd say start there.
  - b. Resources
    - i. **SLIDE** - QR Code - document with book recommendations, video recommendations, and a reading and memory verse plan
5. I must warn you: this morning's message will feel less like a sermon engaging in the details of a particular text.
6. My goal is to give a 30,000 foot overview of the book of Ephesians, and here's why...
  - a. Because when we know the big picture, 30,000 ft. perspective, the text as a whole and all the details within make more sense...they fit together.
    - i. In the summer of 1933, a professor at Oxford University was grading exam papers. One of those exam papers had a blank page at the end. This professor then wrote these words, "In a hole in a ground there lived a hobbit."
    - ii. Now, for us having watched the Lord of the Rings, those words are significant!
      1. We know what he means by hobbit.
      2. We know what he means by a hobbit living in a hole - we know this is not a nasty, dirty, wet hole - our minds go to Bilbo and then Frodo's house at Bag-End in the Shire
      3. We know that hobbits are small, like to mind their business, but a few hobbits went on a incredible adventure and were the unlikely heroes of Middle-earth, defeating the Dark Lord Sauron by destroying the ring of power.



- iii. When we read the opening words of the Hobbit, these words hold weight - they have context - because we are already familiar with the story!
    - 1. But for JRR Tolkien, the author of the Hobbit and the LOTR, after he wrote that line, he thought, "I better find out what hobbits are like."
    - 2. Thus, the first drops of the downpour of his imagination that gifted us the stories of Middle-Earth, began...
  - b. As with Tolkien writing the Hobbit, when you first read that line - if you have no clue what a hobbit is or the story of Middle-earth, then you have a lot of gaps to fill in
    - i. But as with any work of fiction you begin reading, as you continue to read, you fill in the gaps along the way.
  - c. And, as with any work of fiction, the second time you read The Hobbit, you have more context and understanding for what you are reading.
  - d. For you have the bigger picture of the whole story as a frame of reference
  - e. The context knowledge gives weight to the words, "In a hole in a ground there lived a hobbit."
    - i. Without the context knowledge of the big picture story, the words don't carry much weight.
7. Without any further ado, let's open up to Ephesians 1.

[Read Text] - **SLIDE** - Ephesians 1:1-2

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will:

To the faithful saints in Christ Jesus at Ephesus:

<sup>2</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[Christian Standard Bible](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), Eph 1:1-2.

Hook - Narrow Focus/Perspective

1. In 1818, a Scottish sailor named John Ross and his crew travelled the North Canadian Arctic - looking for a water route that would connect the Atlantic to the Pacific.
  - a. He led two ships.
  - b. One day, as his ship was sailing, he saw massive mountain peaks
  - c. They looked to be 25 miles ahead, and it was clear to John that they blocked any possible further exploration. They could not find a passage. So they went home.
  - d. Fascinatingly, John's second in command, the captain of the ship behind him did not see the mountains.
  - e. This captain did not believe Ross.
  - f. A year later, he went on the same expedition in the Candian Artic.
  - g. He then saw the mountains!
  - h. But then he sailed right through them.
  - i. It turns out, Captain Ross's eyes fooled him.

- j. It was a mirage, but unlike a mirage that makes it look like there's water on the ground ahead of you in desert, this mirage is unique to being near one of the earth's poles.
  - k. It was an inverse mirage.
  - l. It turns out, the mountains Ross saw were real.
  - m. But instead of being 25 miles away, they were 200 miles away.
  - n. Ross saw what was there, but it was bigger than it actually was.
  - o. And his faulty perspective ended his expedition early.
- 2. Perspective is everything.
- 3. But sometimes, our perspective can fool us into seeing things that are not actually there, or seeing things larger than that really are
- 4. It has been my perspective that this is how the Church has often approached the book of Ephesians...
  - a. My sophomore year of HS, I went to a private Lutheran school
  - b. That year, our school had a verse of the year
  - c. Eph. 2:8 - For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift [Christian Standard Bible](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), Eph 2:8.
  - d. A great verse - but it was the only verse that was talked about
  - e. It clearly communicated the important doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone, separate from works.
  - f. But here's the problem...It was presented as
    - i. Highly Individualistic
      - 1. Which, Ephesians, as with the rest of the Bible, is far from an individualistic focused book
    - ii. Out of the Wider Context - the story and argument of Ephesians
    - iii. Did Not Give a "Therefore...— A story to live out in the present
      - 1. What was the story that the students heard from this isolated verse?
        - a. "Works don't matter. Therefore, do whatever you want!"
      - 2. We all assumed Ephesians was just a list of truths we were supposed to believe - a far cry from a story we are called to live out.
  - g. It overlooked the whole of Ephesians, and gave us a faulty perspective.
    - i. The perspective was that Ephesians was summed up in this one verse about faith and salvation.
    - ii. My story - grew up in the church
    - iii. Assumed the Christian story was: believe Jesus died on the cross for your sins and you'll go to heaven when you die.
    - iv. That was a lot of what I learned in church.
    - v. But it is actually not what the Bible is about!
    - vi. Yes, trusting in Jesus and his death on the cross winning the victory over sin and death is important, but the story of the Bible is not about escaping earth to go to heaven, but the anticipation of heaven coming to earth, and

living, in the present, as foretastes of that future heaven on earth reality by how we love God and love others (even our enemies).

Transition into the text:

1. My hope for us as a community is that we would lay aside assumptions, and allow Ephesians to speak to us over the next nine weeks (and not just these nine weeks but throughout our lives)
2. That we would, as much as possible, have a clear-eyed perspective when it comes to the message of this book and the implications for our lives.
3. And for this morning, we are going to look at the 30,000 message of Ephesians
  - a. Like knowing the general storyline of The Hobbit, we will be able to engage in the incredible details of Ephesians with context, knowing where we're going.
4. The goal is that we would as a community have our minds and imaginations shaped by this book - thus affecting how we live our present-day lives—conforming our vision with the vision of Paul as given in Ephesians.
  - a. **SLIDE** - We need a lifelong immersion in the texts of the Scriptures - soaking ourselves in the language so that when we put down our Bibles we can improvise living out that language in whatever we encounter. - Marva Dawn

Bible: Ephesians Content - 30,000 foot view

1. Who
  - a. Paul - was imprisoned - Most likely in Rome
    1. During this time, he wrote (or, more likely, dictated) four letters that have been preserved as authoritative texts (meaning, this has been tested and determined as authentically the word of God through Paul, and therefore has authority over our lives as the people of God).
  - b. The Saints (in Ephesus is a later addition)
    - i. Circular Letter
    - ii. Ephesians + the surrounding cities
      1. Like a letter to Seattle (a large, metropolitan port city that can include in addition to Seattle proper, Bothell, Everett and Tacoma)
      2. Port City in West Asia Minor in the First Century
      3. Most important Roman city in the province of Asia minor
      4. A mixture of Jews and Gentiles living among one another, mostly amicably.
2. Why + The Message + Outline
  - a. Why did he write this:
    - i. This is a letter of encouragement to Christians under pressure by the surrounding idolatry and cultural ways that are opposite of the way of Jesus.

- ii. And Paul is giving them the big picture perspective
- iii. And how does he do that?
- iv. He shares the story of God that they are in the middle of
  - 1. Early on in my Jesus-following days, up until recently really, I just assumed Ephesians was a condensed Romans - like a theological treatise Paul put together in a hurry (though he was in prison so he shouldn't have felt rushed).
  - 2. But Ephesians is not a theological creed or an introductory systematic theology document
    - a. Though there is rich, deep theology in every verse!
  - 3. Rather, it is Paul's description of the drama that is unfolding in their midst, that they, and we, play a part in...
    - a. **SLIDE** - Ephesians is not a doctrinal treatise in the scholastic sense of that term. It is, rather, a drama in which Paul portrays the powerful, reality-altering, cosmos-transforming acts of God in Christ to redeem God's world and save God's people for the glory of his name. - Timothy Gombis, PhD. (*The Drama of Ephesians*)
    - b. Church, as we study Ephesians, I want you to have this lens on: This is a story - or, more specifically, this is our story.
  - 4. What is the story? Church, this story is this:
    - a. God, the Creator of all things, is the redeemer of all things in Christ Jesus.
    - b. Why does the world need to be redeemed?
    - c. Because humanity, deceived by powers of darkness, turned their backs on God, thus infecting good creation of God - the wholeness and goodness of God's creation, Shalom - with the curse of sin, death, decay and evil.
    - d. But God, instead of turning his back on the world, began a mission to redeem and heal the world.
    - e. This mission began with the people of Israel, but they, like the humans in the garden, did not follow God's ways, and thus made an even greater mess of things...
    - f. But God came in the flesh in Jesus Christ, God's Son, to save the world.
    - g. But this involved defeating the enemy that caused the deception in the first place



- h. The defeat of the enemy paradoxically looked like the victory of the enemy, as Jesus laid his life down on the cross.
  - i. But death could not hold him.
  - j. God the Father, by the Spirit, raised Christ the Son from the dead.
  - k. And after Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father,
  - l. The Spirit descended to the new humanity - the new community built up in Christ
  - m. The Holy Spirit of God lives in this community that is in Christ
  - n. A new temple-dwelling of God -
    - i. Like God with Israel dwelling in the tabernacle and then the Temple
    - ii. Like Jesus coming into the world to dwell with sinful humanity
  - o. The Church is to be the presence of God in a world that is suffering and causing suffering
  - p. The end goal of the story has always been the reconciliation of heaven and earth - the presence of God dwelling with the presence of humanity on earth.
  - q. And God will one day make all things new - reconciling finally, and once and for all, the full presence of God in heaven and a fully healed creation free from the decay and infection of Sin.
  - r. But in the meantime, The Church, the body of Christ on earth as Christ is at the right hand of the Father, is to, in its unique expressions, be communities that are a foretaste of new creation.
  - s. In the words of NT Wright, we are to be working models of the New Creation - as the temple was a working model of the joining together of heaven and earth.
5. That is the story of God that we find ourselves in.
  6. And that is what Paul in Ephesians is driving at.
- v. Table Church, I have good news for you:
    1. God's New Creation is breaking into the present
    2. But The choice is ours...
      - a. to be a new creation expression or repression.



- vi. Now, you may be thinking, if God's new creation is breaking into the present, I'm sure seeing a lot of evil and suffering taking ground...
  - 1. Yes, and that is because we are right in the middle of it.
  - 2. And Ephesians is going to give us perspective on our place and our duty in the story of God redeeming and reconciling all things in his Son.
  - 3. [My intro?]

### 3. Outline of the Story

- a. Let's look at the map for the journey
  - i. Map (fill in the blank outline?)
    - 1. Eph. 1 - Greeting and Praise Embedded in the story of God and their place in it
      - a. A story of God's dwelling in and among God's people
      - b. A story of reconciliation and bringing into harmony and union all things in Christ
        - i. Church. I cannot wait for next Sunday as we dive into the next section!
    - 2. Eph. 2 - Reconciliation (United to God and to One Another)
      - a. Reconciliation implies that there was separation
        - i. And in those days, the separation was the divide between Jews and Non-Jews
    - 3. Eph. 3 - Yes, You heard that right, One Another (including Gentiles) + A Prayer
    - 4. THEREFORE (The Big hinge transition from worship to mission - from identity and belonging to behavior and family rules - from Praise to Practice - from the indicative to the imperative)
    - 5. Eph. 4a - 4:1-16 | What this new temple - the Body of Christ - looks like in practice (Unity)
    - 6. 4b - 4:17-5:20 | Turning away from the old life, and living out the new life (Holiness)
      - a. Church, if there are two things we can pursue as a community, it is UNITY and HOLINESS
    - 7. Eph. 5b - 5:21-6:9 New Creation Expression in Relationships
      - a. IN LIGHT OF THIS STORY OF NEW CREATION AND NEW TEMPLE THAT IS US...We are in for some surprises when it comes to marital relations, parental relations, and slave/master relations
    - 8. Eph. 6b - 6:10-20 | The real war and the real enemy and the equipment necessary for warfare + Closing Greeting
  - b. **SLIDE** - Themes to keep an eye out for:
    - i. Like where's Waldo
      - 1. Dwelling / Temple / Fulness (Fill)
      - 2. Bringing Together / Reconciliation (God and Us, Jew/Gentile)



3. Love
  4. Darkness
  5. Prayer
4. Why this Matters
    - a. Why do I give you all this?
    - b. Because I want us to situate ourselves as we embark on the drama of Ephesians together, and soak our imaginations in this text.
    - c. For with all this context knowledge, we can experience the significance of each and every word and sentence in this dense ancient letter - just as reading "In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit..." there is significance to those words
    - d. And this story is one we are invited to live into and live out in our daily lives...
      - i. When we remember the story of God's love and his mission to redeem us and restore all things, we are living out Ephesians.
      - ii. When we pursue unity with brothers and sisters in Christ - even the ones that annoy us - we are living out Ephesians.
      - iii. When we turn away sin and pursue holiness, wisdom and love - we are living out Ephesians
      - iv. When we encounter the subtle strategy of deception from the spiritual powers of darkness, and counter this with truth and with prayer - we are living out Ephesians.
  5. In order to live out this story, we need to soak our imaginations in the story so that when we put down our Bibles we can improvise living out this story in our daily lives.
  6. How do we do this? Here are some recommendations...

Challenge:

1. **SLIDE** - Read Ephesians EVERY DAY
  - a. Try different translations
2. **SLIDE** - Read Ephesians in one sitting (consider doing this a few times during this series, but within the limits of life)
3. **SLIDE** - Memorize Ephesians ch. 1 (particularly 20-23)
  - a. From reading it regularly and memorizing it, you will have your vision of the world radically shaped by this letter - and you will live out the drama of Ephesians in your day-to-day life.

Why:

1. We are soaking our imaginations in Ephesians, that we may INHABIT the story Ephesians tells.
  - a. We live out the stories we believe, whether that be conscious stories or unconscious stories.



- b. As much as we can, by the help of the Holy Spirit, we are going to conform our unconscious mind to believe not the lies the world tells us or we tell ourselves, but the true story of God redeeming and reconciling all things in Christ Jesus.
  - c. Imagine what peace will result if you truly lived out this story.
  - d. Imagine the confidence and hope as you face the challenges of sin and evil in this world, knowing that you are a part of a great battle that is already won - the enemy is giving a last stand before final elimination.
2. This is the story given to us in Ephesians
  3. This is the story we are invited to indwell and to shape us from the inside out

#### Belgrade Assault:

1. The other day I was meeting with Pastor Mark, and he asked me if I had heard about middle schooler who was beat up by four other middle schoolers outside of the Belgrade Library
2. Lost boys living out a deceptive false story
  - a. I imagine it being a story of being cool is everything, beating up a student is a way of fitting in and getting much craved attention on social media.
3. Evil embodied and enacted in the bodies of juveniles
4. As a community empowered by God's Spirit to be a working model of the new creation, we need to declare: Not on our watch. Not in our community.
  - a. This doesn't mean fighting people as the enemy, but rather fighting the true enemy - we do not wage war with flesh and blood but with the powers and principalities
  - b. This is the reality of the story we are in the midst of
  - c. And we are going to talk more about spiritual warfare in the coming weeks.
5. But for now, the first step in spiritual warfare is making sure we are not deceived and thus live out false stories
6. But rather that we so saturate our minds in the scriptures that we are formed by and live out the story of God reconciling all things in Christ.

Let's pray

[Come, Holy Spirit.

Help us see Jesus.

Set our hearts blaze for you.]

#### Response Time

1. Receive - A communal enacting the story of God redeeming all things through the suffering and death of his Son
  - a. He gives us his very self
  - b. The Bread of the Lord's Broken Body and the Cup of his blood poured out
  - c. Explain why we do this weekly
    - i. Physical act that tells us from the inside-out who we are and who we belong to and the cost of that belonging

- d. As we fast, we also take this moment to feast -
    - i. For Jesus is the bread that truly satisfies our hunger, and the cup that satisfies our thirst
  - e. "All of me for all of you." Tom Wright
  - f. "As we break bread together, we remember he was broken so that we might become one whole new humanity. As we drink from the cup, we remember his blood was spilled so that we do not need to spill more blood but instead seek the peace of our neighborhoods and the world." - JR Woodward
2. Receive - Prayer - no need for pride to get in the way
- a. For repentance
  - b. Healing
3. Call people to repentance and faith in Jesus
- a. To find one's life story under the grand story of the Gospel - the reversal of death and decay in the self-giving sacrifice of God's Son - and to live out of that new story as a New Creation!
  - b. If you have not yet declared your allegiance to Jesus, please let one of our prayer team members know. We would love to pray for you. And then they'll point you to me to connect about next steps toward baptism - an external expression and declaration of one's commitment to be immersed in the reality of the fellowship of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

