

**Discovering Your Identity  
Ephesians 1: 3-14  
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I recently came across the true story of a Swedish woman, Johanna Sandstrom, who three years ago walked into a tattoo shop with the intention of honoring her two children by having their names permanently inked on her arm. On the drive home her cousin took a picture of the new tattoo so that she could see it from the correct angle. There she saw the names - Nova and Kelvin - with an "L". Only, her son's name was Kevin, which as you know, has no "L". Somehow they skipped the part where you at least double-check the accuracy of something that will remain on your body forever.

After returning to the shop and discovering the complexity of correcting a tattoo through laser surgery and learning how long that might take, they decided to just rename her son Kelvin to match the tattoo. Regarding how they feel about the new name, Johanna told reporters this past May, "Now we like it better and do not want to change back." At least, that's what she's telling the world.

Identity theft. That is what we're calling this journey through the letter to the Ephesians. We live in a world where it's easier to change your name than to change a tattoo. We take on and take off identities like costumes. We long for something, for someone, to give us an identity deep enough and true enough to capture our truest selves, and yet so often we settle for identities that rob us of that truth. This ancient letter to the Ephesian church invites us to listen to the truth about who we are and, as we do so, it invites us to stretch our imaginations.

For me, the challenge with this particular passage is that it pretty much stands on its own as an amazing piece of poetry. It is a symphony of words that needs to be relished and enjoyed...not analyzed. Imagine sitting down to a feast of every kind of delicious food you can imagine. And then imagine some food snob describing in agonizing detail the history of each dish, the meticulous details of how it was prepared, the nutritional value...

The distinct terroir of each dish...Meanwhile, the whole time you're just thinking, "CAN WE EAT IT ALREADY?" I don't want to be the food snob who ruins the feast.

Many New Testament letters, after the initial greetings, move into a section of thanksgiving for the particular community being addressed as well as ways in which the writer is praying for them. Not Ephesians. Paul wastes no time after the greetings in verses 1 and 2 and opens like a fireworks display in reverse, sending the full arsenal into the sky at the beginning rather than at the end.



Verses 3-14 function like a good overture does in the beginning of a Broadway musical. It sets the tone for all that follows and includes bits and pieces of the songs that will help unfold the plot. It gives the broad direction and arc for where the music will go.

So Paul begins in verse 3 by telling the story in which we find ourselves and he tells it in a manner that is thoroughly doxological. It is praise and thanksgiving from beginning to end. It is also one gigantic run-on sentence. Though, mercifully, modern translations have inserted punctuation into the passage, the original Greek is one very long complex sentence with various grammatical puzzles.

Have you ever asked a child to describe for you an experience they found incredibly joyful? Say, like time spent at a summer camp? It's not just their words that tell the story. Their whole body cannot contain the excitement. That is how I hear these verses and if you think I'm using a lot of metaphors, I'm just trying to keep pace with the Apostle Paul. He employs all kinds of ways of describing what God has done in Christ and doesn't even stop to take a breath. The passage says practically nothing at all about what we ought to do. It is all about what God has done. Listen to the verbs describing God's action just in the first 8 verses.

God blessed us. God chose us. God destined us for adoption. God bestowed and lavished grace on us. Then there are the various metaphors throughout the passage. Adoption as God's children. Redemption through Christ's blood. Forgiveness of trespasses. Obtaining an inheritance. Being marked with a seal of the Holy Spirit. All of these full of meaning in their own right but none of them saying everything Paul wants to say.

Throughout this opening section, a fascinating thing happens. Even as Paul describes this cosmic landscape and the picture becomes more and more full, the whole focus throughout is held singularly and unwaveringly on the person of Jesus Christ. There is this repetitive cadence throughout of everything God does being done "in Christ" or "in Him." Around ten times the point is hammered home that God's saving action has taken place in and through Christ.

God has blessed us in Christ. God chose us in Christ, destines us for adoption through Christ. In Christ we have redemption and forgiveness, the mystery of God's will was set forth in Christ, we receive our inheritance in Christ, and we are marked by the Holy Spirit in Christ. Jesus is unapologetically at the center of it all. There is no sidestepping the centrality of Christ for our story.

Let's take a moment and focus in on verses 9 and 10, because they are just so beautiful. With all wisdom and insight, God has made known to us not a fact, not a self-help strategy, not a series of instructions...God has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.



Imagine that - the mystery of God's will is to gather up all things in Christ. The image Paul paints here is almost like God reaching out and scooping up planets, solar systems, and galaxies, the whole groaning creation, and at the same time scooping up the poor, the brokenhearted, the lonely, you and me and all of our particular griefs and joys and intricacies that make us who we are.

This holistic picture of the unfolding of God's will in Christ should then inform our understanding of what the inheritance is that is spoken of in verse 11. It's tempting, perhaps, to think of it as heaven as popularly understood in our culture. But the image is of heaven and earth coming together. God created the world and won't simply abandon it. The inheritance Paul speaks of is the world; not as it is now. Our inheritance is the world remade and renewed in God's kingdom when it fully comes, with Jesus at the very center of it all.

Underneath this big picture there is a subtle but powerful message. The inheritance is a shared inheritance. Throughout verses 3-12 the pronouns used are exclusively "we" and "us". Then suddenly, in verse 13 it shifts to "you", suggesting perhaps that a different audience is being addressed. Verses 11-12 and then 13-14 sound like they are calling two distinct groups - Jews and Gentiles - to the same task. Verses 11-12 say, "In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance - we who were the first to set our hope on Christ - so that we might live for the praise of his glory."

Then the voice changes. Verse 13 - "In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit." But then the voice shifts back to the 1st person plural in verse 14, referring to the Holy Spirit. "This is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory - the same phrase as in verse 12."

In the span of just a few verses you see Paul working out theologically what has happened in Christ. God is forming a new people including both Jew and Gentile with Jesus the Messiah as their Lord. No matter how often we hear this it should blow our minds. This was *the* division of the day and the gospel cuts right through it.

Those who find themselves in Christ are called not just to tolerate one another. They are called to share an amazing inheritance. God's presence through the Holy Spirit is the downpayment, the guarantee that that future is coming.

The task to which this opening section of Ephesians calls us is to so shape and structure our lives that they are habitually characterized by worship. When we discover our identity - that it is far bigger and deeper than we ever could have imagined - children of God, heirs to the inheritance, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world and gathered up in Christ out of sheer and utter grace, we cannot help but offer our worship to the praise of God's glory. Amen.



### Resources

Lapin, Tamar. "Mom Changes Son's Name after Tattoo Spelling Error." New York Post, New York Post, 16 May 2018, [nypost.com/2018/05/16/mom-changes-sons-name-after-tattoo-spelling-error/](https://nypost.com/2018/05/16/mom-changes-sons-name-after-tattoo-spelling-error/).

Soards, Marion L. "Commentary on Ephesians 1:3-14." Ephesians 2:11-22 Commentary by Kyle Fever - Working Preacher - Preaching This Week (RCL), 3 Jan. 2010, [www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=492](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=492).