

EPHESIANS: GOD'S BLUEPRINT FOR OUR SPIRITUAL MATURITY
EPHESIANS 2:1-7
2ND STREET COMMUNITY CHURCH
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Welcome to 2nd Street's time of gathered worship. On Sunday's we're **THE CHURCH GATHERED**, and throughout the week we're **THE CHURCH SCATTERED**, in homes, Community Groups, in schools, at our jobs, and with family and friends. We don't get together on Sundays just to "get our once a week spiritual fix by being with God". We come together on Sundays to celebrate the fact that we're seeking to know, listen to, obey, and stay in step with Jesus Christ consistently throughout the week.

Someone recently asked me to explain to them why I teach God's Word the way I do on Sunday mornings. And so I thought that today was a good time for our *once-a-year refresher course* about why I feel called by God to teach His Word the way I do.

The question came from someone who in past church involvements had been used to their pastors teaching God's Word **TOPICALLY** ... which is where a topic such as **LOVE, FAITH, RELATIONSHIPS**, or something else is selected ... and then a single teaching, or a series of teachings are prepared on that **TOPICS** using a variety of passages from God's Word. With **TOPICAL** teaching there's often an **INTRODUCTION, ONE MAIN POINT** that is illustrated by supporting points, and a **CONCLUSION** where the **ONE MAIN POINT** is driven home and **APPLICATION** is made to people's daily lives.

I don't believe that **TOPICAL** teaching is wrong; it's just not what I've been called to do on a consistent basis. Oh there will be a Sunday here and there when I'll share a **TOPICAL** teaching ... but I've primarily been called to teach through God's Word one book at a time, verse-by-verse, which called **EXPOSITIONAL** teaching.

The word *exposition* is from the Latin word *exponere*, which means to put out, to exhibit, or to explain.

In **EXPOSITIONAL** teaching, the emphasis isn't on developing **ONE MAIN POINT** that is **APPLIED** during the teaching's **CONCLUSION**, but rather to teach through a passage from the Bible and **INVITE GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT TO USE EACH VERSE AND EACH WORD** to make a variety of different **APPLICATION** points to our lives along the way.

The publisher of your Bible - not the original authors - added the section headings and paragraph titles you see from page to page. In other words, they weren't part of the original text. They were added to help us as readers anticipate and understand the meaning of the section of God's Word we're reading and digesting. Different Bibles translations and paraphrases are made with different goals in mind, and because of this, their passages are divided up differently ... beginning or ending on this verse or that verse. You've probably noticed this.

For example, *The New International Version* is an **IDEA-BASED TRANSLATION** of the Bible, and not a translation based on the **INDIVIDUAL WORDS OF THE VERSES** of the

Bible. This is why in *The New International Version* the verses are printed out in paragraphs with **HEADINGS** over each paragraph. And when a new **IDEA** or **THEME** begins in the passage, a new paragraph and a new **HEADING** appears.

But the *New American Standard Bible* isn't an **IDEA-BASED TRANSLATION**, it's a translation based on the **INDIVIDUAL WORDS OF THE VERSES**. That's why in the *New American Standard Bible* each verse is its own paragraph. I use the *New American Standard Bible* as my main Bible to study and teach from because with its primary focus on the **INDIVIDUAL WORDS OF THE VERSES**, I find it easier to invite and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to me about what God wants the words to convey to me verse-by-verse, instead of **THE BIBLE TRANSLATION ITSELF** telling me what to think. So the *New American Standard Bible* is my Bible of choice for studying and teaching.

But as you've probably noticed, I use various Bible translations and paraphrases when I study and teach God's Word. Here are my favorites:

- *New American Standard Bible*
- *English Standard Version*
- *New Living Translation*
- *New Century Version*
- *The Amplified Bible*
- *The Message* by Eugene Peterson
- *The Expanded Translation of the New Testament* by Kenneth Wuest ... primarily used for Greek word studies
- *The New Testament In Modern English* by J.B. Phillips

Unlike **TOPICAL** teaching, in which there is usually **ONE MAIN POINT** ... what I love about **EXPOSITIONAL** teaching is that it frees God up to make **MANY POINTS** throughout a passage ... and the **APPLICATIONS** of the truths in these verses can be as many, and as deep, and as wide as the Nile and all the streams that flow in and out of it. And this isn't because of my intellect, or because of my ability to teach, but because of God's desire to instruct each of us through His Word in the areas where each of us most need instruction, encouragement, correction, and equipping.

I don't know what challenges each of you are wrestling with week to week. But God knows. I don't know where each of you is hurting this morning. But God knows. I don't know what important decisions you have to make today or this week. But God knows. I simply have the unique responsibility and joy of getting to team-teach with God whenever I stand before you and ask you take out your Bibles and open them up.

By being an **EXPOSITIONAL** teacher instead of a **TOPICAL** teacher, I don't have to make **ONE MAIN POINT** with **THREE SUPPORTING POINTS** that all begin with words starting with the same letter ... which in Seminary is called "alliteration." Weird, how that sounds curiously similar to "illiterate." Instead, while I'm studying and preparing during the week, I get to listen to God and then teach through however many verses seems right to me - **AND GOD GETS TO DO THE APPLICATION TO EACH PERSON DIFFERENTLY, BASED ON THEIR SPECIFIC, INDIVIDUAL NEEDS, AS WE GO THROUGH THE PASSAGE VERSE-BY-VERSE.**

And these differences between **TOPICAL** and **EXPOSITIONAL** teaching can also make a difference in how you listen to God's Word being taught. So don't just wait to listen to the end of each teaching to receive an **APPLICATION**. Instead, listen all the way

through, and invite God's Holy Spirit to make **APPLICATION** to your life, to your wounds, to your joys, and to your needs, verse-by-verse ... for I believe that this is how you and I can best connect with God's precious Word because with this kind of instruction and listening, then verse-by-verse we allow God, not just me as your teacher, to connect His Word with what's going on in our lives. And that my friends, is miraculous.

And so what I'm hoping and praying for is that as this miracle of God's instruction and **APPLICATION** of His Word to our hearts unfolds each Sunday, that our passion for being in God's Word, not just on Sundays, but **THROUGHOUT THE WEEK** will blossom. This is also why we always print the **ANNUAL BIBLE READING PLAN** passage for the week in our bulletin each Sunday. And while the passages in the **ANNUAL BIBLE READING PLAN** don't always connect directly with what I'm teaching through Sunday to Sunday, God's Word will always connect with what God desires to teach us.

Will I be able to teach through the whole Bible while I'm 2nd Street's lead pastor-teacher? Who knows? My goal isn't to teach the whole Bible before I die. My goal is simpler than that ... it's just to get into the Bible with passion and consistency, and invite it to get into us in ways that transform us and draw us more deeply into the character of Jesus Christ so that we can more consistently live into, and live out the will of God. And that my friends, is why I do what I do, the way I do it.

Please take out your Bibles and turn with me to **EPHESIANS 2**, and this morning we'll look into **vv. 1-7** ... which divides up real simply into two parts ... **vv. 1-3** and **vv. 4-7**. In **EPHESIANS 1** Paul taught us as the disciples and the followers of Jesus Christ that God has given us many blessings ...

- God blesses us with all kinds of gifts, and provisions.
- God chose us before the foundation of the world.
- God adopts us as His sons and daughters when we come into relationship and fellowship with Him through His Son, Jesus Christ.
- God forgives our sins when we confess them to Him in repentance.
- God promises us the inheritance of heaven and the gifts and the fruits of His Holy Spirit.
- God made us His body, which Paul calls "the church."

And now, as we begin **EPHESIANS 2**, Paul reminds us what you and I as Christians were before receiving all these great blessings from God. And Paul starts this first verse of **EPHESIANS 2** with our favorite topic ... us, about you and me.

EPHESIANS 2:1 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹ And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,

If we were to take a picture of everyone who attends 2nd Street and who calls this flock their "church home", and then blew that picture up real huge and wallpapered the back wall of the Armory with it, who would you look for when you walked up to that wall for the first time. Of course, every one of us would look for ourselves first. We wouldn't be able to help ourselves. We're messed up that way, right? And yet Paul doesn't start off with flattery, or by stroking our egos! Instead, he starts off by

reminding us of the truth that before we met Jesus, every single one of us was **dead** in our **trespasses** and in our **sins**. And these three words, **dead**, **trespasses**, and **sins**, are important for us to understand as we go on the quest to figure out who we are.

Before we meet Jesus Christ and come into a relationship with Him we're walking, talking, and living, but **spiritually we're dead**, because we're disconnected from God, who is the **AUTHOR OF LIFE**, and we're yielded to and yoked with the **AUTHOR OF DEATH**, whose name is Satan, and with our own **sin nature**, that inside part of us that keeps tempting us with **sinful thoughts and choices**.

sin ... the Greek word, *hamartia*, translated sin in English, is from an Old English archery term that literally means "to miss the mark." When an archer failed to shoot his arrow through the hoop in a competition, they were called a sinner. And we can miss the mark, even when we're trying to hit the mark. In other words, sinning isn't always just about rebellion, because it can also be about weakness.

trespasses ... the Greek word, *paraptoma*, is different, and actually worse than the Greek word for sin, because a trespass is a willful, deliberate act of disobedience to God where God's will is challenged.

But whether it's missing God's mark because of brokenness, weakness, or pain ... or a willful, deliberate decision to turn away from God ... the result is the same - separation from God, and in that place of separation is spiritual death. Let's look at v. 2 ...

EPHESIANS 2:2 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

The word **walked** here means to **meander or roam about**. And this is what **sin** and **trespasses** do to us ... they take away our focus, our vision, and our purpose, and we end up, instead of really living life, just killing time. And gang, God has more for us than just **meandering** through life. And when we choose to just go with the current of the world, and walk **according to the course of the world**, we're settling for so much less than God has for us.

ILLUSTRATION ... Teresa and I have often enjoyed playing the board game **BALDERDASH**. Maybe you've played it. It has cards with English words that most of us have never heard of, and the person whose turn it is writes down the word **AND THE REAL MEANING**, and then the other players write down the word along with a meaning they **MAKE UP**. And then you're awarded points based on whether you choose the **REAL MEANING**, or if your **MADE UP MEANING** is chosen.

And I discovered one of my favorite words I've ever heard while playing **BALDERDASH** ... the word **horbgorbble** which means "to putter around aimlessly". It's even fun to say! **Horbgorbble**.

And when we make the choice to live according the leadings and the currents of this world, and to just **horbgorbble** along with the flow of Satan, Paul calls us here in v. 2 sons and daughters of disobedience. What a horrible but true title to have slapped onto us if this is the life-path we choose to take. So many times we say, “Oh, I’m just doing my own thing!” But no we’re not. Because when we’re not “doing God’s thing” ... and when we’re not following God’s will for our lives ... and when we’re not walking in step with God, we’re not **DOING OUR OWN THING**, we’re being led around by and manipulated by the god of the world, and his name is Satan.

Until we come into relationship with God, we’re citizens of this world. But once we surrender our lives to God and receive His forgiveness, our citizenship is changed, and we transform from being **sons and daughters of disobedience**, and become what Paul calls in SECOND CORINTHIANS 5:17 new creations in Christ Jesus.

Why is it that we can be so fearful to submit our lives and our wills over to the God of the Universe, to the One who knows us and loves us and only has His plans and His purposes on His heart for us? David explained where we need to be at in regard to this surrender in PSALM 40:8 ...

PSALM 40:8 (NEW LIVING TRANSLATION)

⁸ I take joy in doing Your will, my God, for Your law is written on my heart.

And I see our FIRST FAITH LESSON here this morning ...

FAITH LESSON

When we’re fearful or unwilling to submit to the will of God, we stay in step with the will of Satan for our lives. None of us can come up with a better plan for our lives than God can. God’s plan is the plan of blessing, hope, and fulfillment. So let’s stop meandering and horbgorbbling around on our own, and instead, connect with God and with God’s purposes for our lives.

If you’ve ever looked through old photo albums, or boxes of photos, and thought about the past, then you know that it’s impossible to only think of good, happy, and pleasant memories. Because mixed in will always be some painful memories too ... many of them linked to our life before we were in Jesus Christ.

EPHESIANS 2:2 is like looking at a photo album of what life was like before Jesus was the One we were believing in, leaning on, and following. And Paul’s saying, “Remember, back to when you were meandering through life and taking your cues about how to think, talk, live, and how to come up with your priorities from the world, instead of from Jesus?” Paul goes on with this thought in v. 2 ...

EPHESIANS 2:2 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

The Greek word for course in v. 2 is aiona, and it means a specific, allotted period of time, or the spirit of a period. The 1920's are often called The Roaring 20s. A child's second year of life is often referred to as The Terrible Twos! David Crosby of *Crosby, Stills, Nash, and sometimes Young*, once said that "If you say that you clearly remember the 1960s, then you weren't really there." But the course, the aiona, or the spirit of the 1960s and 1970s were **REBELLION** and **FREEDOM**. I think if Paul was here today he might ask us to rephrase EPHESIANS 2:2 into something like ...

Remember what your life used to be like ... back when you were walking around in circles, unable to get off the track you were stuck on? Most of the time you didn't even realize you were held hostage, manipulated by the spirit of your times, by the influences of your culture, and by whatever society was saying "yes" to at the time.

And I see a **SECOND FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON

When we come into a relationship with Jesus Christ, we stop being the "driven by sin person" Paul describes here. We become a child of God, and the Holy Spirit comes to live inside us. Let's remember who we used to be, **AND THEN OUT OF THAT PLACE OF REMEMBRANCE** let's invite God to break our hearts for the people we know who are still trapped in the *spirit of this age*, and by the *sinful influences of this world*.

Aren't you glad somebody told you about Jesus? Isn't it time for you to share what you know about Jesus with someone you love?

EPHESIANS 2:3 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Paul is saying here that before we're born again, we're controlled by our flesh and by the woundedness of our own broken plans and broken minds. Gang, there are only two options ... **FIRST**, we can be controlled by our sin nature, and by the woundedness of our own plans and our own minds, or **SECOND**, we can be controlled by the Holy Spirit.

When we get to EPHESIANS 5 in our study, we'll find out that when a Believer is out of fellowship with God, because they're walking and meandering through life, being led by everything by God's Holy Spirit, that they will imitate the thoughts, words, actions, and priorities of those who aren't Believers. Here's how Paul talks about this in ROMANS 8:6 ...

ROMANS 8:6 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁶ If your sinful nature controls your mind, there is death. But if the Holy Spirit controls your mind, there is life and peace.

And I see a **THIRD FAITH LESSON** here this morning ...

FAITH LESSON

When our minds are in line with the Holy Spirit we'll experience life and peace. But when our minds are in line with our sin nature, everything that comes out of us will be death. What's your choice? Who will you surrender your life, your heart, and your mind to?

Paul put it this way in **FIRST CORINTHIANS 3:12** ...

FIRST CORINTHIANS 3:12 (A PARAPHRASE)

¹² So be careful while picking out the materials to build your life on. The choices only come in two categories ... things that lasts, and things that won't last. We can build our lives on a foundation of gold, silver, and jewels - and have God's guarantee that He'll never leave us ... or we can build on a foundation of wood, hay, and straw - and experience death from the first moment after our decision.

In **v. 4** we come face-to-face with the love of God - because despite which one of these two foundations we've chosen to build on ... and right up until this exact moment in time as we're gathered here this morning - **GOD LOVES US**. And the heights of God's love for us that Paul reveals to us in **vv. 4-7** show how come **EPHESIANS** is often referred to by Bible teachers as **The Alps of The New Testament**.

EPHESIANS 2:4 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

Don't you love the first two words of this verse ... "**But God**"? The description Paul gives us in **EPHESIANS 2:1-3** is what our lives were like before we met Jesus ... and no matter how good our intentions, or how hard we tried to become a "better" person, we always fell short. But praise the Lord for **v. 4** ... **BUT GOD**, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us ...

Grace is the unconditional love of God that takes away our sin, and grace comes to us when we confess our sins to God and He forgives us. But mercy is the unconditional love of God that takes away *the pain of our sin*.

God's mercy is what just keeps coming and coming, and coming, and coming after God's grace shows up on the scene. And God's mercy bandages us up, and begins healing us, and takes away the pain of our sin ... not all the consequences of our sin

... but the pain of our sin, so that our identity doesn't have to remain in our woundedness, in our sin, in our trespasses, and in our horbgorbbling ... but our identity can begin to become established in the character of Jesus Christ Himself. If you want to go deeper into this critical truth, check out *Celebrate Recovery*.

The Greek word translated rich here in v. 4, which is the descriptor Paul applies to God's mercy, is the word **plusious**, and it means **extremely rich**. Pluto, whose name this word comes from, was the god of wealth in Greek culture and mythology. It's the root word we get the word **plutocrat** from, whose definition is **someone who is so rich that he or she has influence over other people**. Do you see how God's mercy is the never-ending supply of the overflow and the maturing of His healing grace?

In ROMANS 12:3 Paul tells us that God has given every Believer a **measure of faith**, and **faith and confession** are the delivery systems for God's **grace**. We put our **faith** in God, and we confess our sins to God, and God pours His **grace** into us through the **measure of faith** we've extended back towards Him. And when **faith** is put into action, it's called **believing**. So again, **mercy is the unconditional love of God that takes away the pain of our sin**, and **believing** is our reaching back to God in **faith**.

I hope you're beginning to see the staggering greatness of God's love toward you and me. JOHN 3:16 ... for God so loved the world that He gave ..." Let's listen to how author Brennan Manning talks about this all encompassing truth about the furious love of God for us ... and how that when we embrace this love of God, and when we believe in this love of God, and when we surrender to this love of God, it only begins to change everything in our lives in the **HERE AND NOW**, and everything about the pain, sorrow, shame, and regret about our **YESTERDAYS**, and everything about our worries, anxieties, and fears about **TOMORROW** ... Let's listen to Brennan ...

VIDEO CLIP: BRENNAN MANNING ... THE LOVE OF GOD | 3:24
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQi_IDV2bgM]

You might be here this morning and saying to yourself, "I'd like to believe that what Brennan is saying is true. But I'm too skeptical, or too in my head to have faith in a God I can't see." Gang, faith doesn't come by someone persuading you. Like Paul writes in ROMANS 10:17, **faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ**. When you and I allow ourselves to hear the Word of Christ, which is the Bible, God pours a **measure of faith** into us, and then as our faith begins to grow, and as the Word of Christ takes root in our life, God will take us from darkness to light, and from death to life.

EPHESIANS 2:5-6 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, 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,

God loved you and me when there wasn't anything in us to love. God doesn't love us because of who or what we are, but because of Who He is. And God's love for us not only found us ... but then it cared enough about us to not let us stay the way He

found us. God picked us up out of the mess that we'd made of our lives, and we started becoming **LESS OF A MESS**. God gave us His life, and a new beginning. God Himself couldn't die in our place, so 2,000 years ago, God's Son, Jesus Christ came to earth as a man ... was born in Bethlehem ... and through His death on the cross, your sin and my sin, and the sin of the whole world was paid for. Do you see it?

Gang, when God found us we were already **dead** ... **dead** in our sins, listening to our sin nature and to the enemy as he let us meander throughout life without purpose or forgiveness. But God wanted us to be **alive** in this life, and then to someday spend eternity with Him. And getting you and me from the point of **death** to being united with God in the **life** of His Kingdom, took the work of our Savior and Mediator, Jesus Christ. No wonder while Paul was preaching to people at Athens, Greece, said ...

ACTS 17:28 (NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

²⁸ For in Him [*in Jesus Christ*], we live and move about, and exist ... for we are His offspring. [*emphasis added*]

And now here in **v. 7** Paul lays out for us the future, and eternal purposes of the grace of God.

EPHESIANS 2:7 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

God's love and grace are so full, so beyond anything we can imagine. And He wants you and me to be with Him throughout all eternity, and to share with Him all **the surpassing riches of His grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus**. Just think of it this way ... if God has a plan for us in eternity, then He must plan on us making it safely through all the valleys, the twisters, the highs and the lows we're going through right now, right? And I see a **FOURTH FAITH LESSON** here this morning ...

FAITH LESSON

Maybe you're going through a hard time right now and there doesn't seem to be any way out. Believe me when I tell you that God has a plan to get out of the mess you're in right now, because He's already set a place for you with Him in heaven. And so, if your **FUTURE** with God is secure, then your **PRESENT** with Him must be secure too.

EPHESIANS 2:7 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

God will keep on revealing the surpassing riches of His grace and kindness to us throughout the ages.

ILLUSTRATION ... Remember those huge dictionaries when you were

in school? Maybe it was a *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*, or even an *Oxford Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language*. It was huge and had thousands and thousands of pages.

I like to think of each page in one of those dictionaries as being an *EON OF TIME*. And when we first enter into God's presence in heaven with the glory and the wonder of living with God for eternity, we'll be so taken with everything that God is, that the first 30 billion years or so will pass by like a breath. And we'll think to ourselves, "Surely, this must be all there is to know about God. I mean, how much more could there possibly be?" And at the uttering of that question God will step up to the great *DICTIONARY OF TIME*, turn the page, and reveal to us new, unthought-of dimensions about the depth, the perspective, and the glorious, indescribable joy of who He is. And eternity will march on. And God will keep turning pages.

Gang, God is going to take all of eternity to show us how the dimensions of His love and grace. I love what Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the 19th-Century British pastor, teacher, and author said about this when he wrote these glorious words ...

"God has as much grace as you want, and He has a great deal more than that. The Lord has as much grace as a whole universe will require, but He has vastly more. He overflows: All the demands that can ever be made on the grace of God will never impoverish Him, or even diminish His store of mercy; there will remain an incalculably precious mine of mercy as full as when He first began to bless the sons [and daughters] of man." (Charles Haddon Spurgeon, 1834-1892)

Let me close with two more verses, to help shape our hearts and our minds toward the mysteries and the miracles God has in store for us as His children as we make the choice to continue walking with Him in His love for us throughout life ...

JAMES 4:6; PHILIPPIANS 4:19 (THE MESSAGE)

^{4:6} And what He [God] gives in love is far better than anything else you'll find.

^{4:19} You can be sure that God will take care of everything you need, His generosity exceeding even yours in the glory that pours from Jesus.

NEXT SUNDAY ... EPHESIANS 2:8-10 ... COME PRAYING AND EXPECTING!