

The Prison Letters...

Ephesians 3 LIFE LESSON

Even though there were Jews living in Ephesus, and therefore synagogues, the entire area was filled with Gentiles and pagan temples to a variety of false gods. And worship services included everything from prostitution to child sacrifices. But instead of wiping Ephesus from the planet with fire and brimstone, God sent Paul to share the Good News with them...

📖 **Ephesians 3:1-2 (NLT)** "...I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the benefit of you Gentiles... assuming, by the way, that you know God gave me the special responsibility of extending his grace to you Gentiles.

➡ **Have you ever felt like God has given you a "special responsibility" of any kind? If so, please explain...**

Paul was at one time the number one enemy of any follower of Jesus. However, Jesus confronted Paul on his way to Damascus and blinded him and everything changed. That's when Paul learned that God was giving him the special responsibility of reaching the Gentiles. But how God informed Paul was very clever...

📖 **Acts 9:10-16 (NLT)** Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord!" he replied. The Lord said, "Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you get there, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying to me right now. I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying hands on him so he can see again." "But Lord," exclaimed Ananias, "I've heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem! And he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who calls upon your name." But the Lord said, "Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake."

➡ **If you had a vision from God like what Ananias had, do you think you would have responded differently? Why or why not?**

Instead of putting people in prison because of their faith in Jesus, Paul was now sitting in a prison cell for the same reason. And again, he knew it was so he could reach Gentiles with God's mysterious plan...

➡ **Ephesians 3:3-11 (NLT)** As I briefly wrote earlier, God himself revealed his mysterious plan to me. As you read what I have written, you will understand my insight into this plan regarding Christ. God did not reveal it to previous generations, but now by his Spirit he has revealed it to his holy apostles and prophets. And this is God's plan: Both Gentiles and Jews who believe the Good News share equally in the riches inherited by God's children. Both are part of the

same body, and both enjoy the promise of blessings because they belong to Christ Jesus. By God's grace and mighty power, I have been given the privilege of serving him by spreading this Good News. Though I am the least deserving of all God's people, he graciously gave me the privilege of telling the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ. I was chosen to explain to everyone this mysterious plan that God, the Creator of all things, had kept secret from the beginning. God's purpose in all this was to use the church to display his wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was his eternal plan, which he carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord.

➔ **In your opinion, why did God choose Paul to be a primary apostle to the Gentiles?**

Beyond the Gentiles, this plan was also meant to be a demonstration of God's wisdom to unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. How? By using us, His body, to accomplish His will in this world. However, it will be hard for us to keep our focus on God's will, especially when we're dealing with something hard, like being in prison! Which is why Paul went on to say this...

📖 **Ephesians 3:12-19 (NLT)** *Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence. So please don't lose heart because of my trials here. I am suffering for you, so you should feel honored. When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.*

➔ **Why can we come boldly and confidently before God? And why is this important?**

➔ **How does Christ make His home in our hearts? And why is this important?**

Losing heart in the midst of hard times is exactly what our enemy wants. This is why Paul was praying that instead of doubting God's love in the midst of hard times, everyone would trust God during hardships just like he was, or recognize when God's will means suffering. So if you're going through some sort of hardship right now, try to dwell on these last two verses of chapter three, and remember what it is our God is capable of doing...

MEMORY PASSAGE FOR THE WEEK

Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.

Ephesians 3:20-21 (NLT)

EPHESIANS 3

LESSON GOAL: Kids will hear Paul talk about his “special appointment” from God and how that helped him keep working even while he was in prison

MEMORY VERSE:

'God is able to do far more than we could ever ask for or imagine. He does everything by his power that is working in us.' | **EPHESIANS 3:20 NIRV**

GOD'S WONDERFUL PLAN FOR THE GENTILES

In Chapter 2, Paul reminded the Ephesians that God's love is for everyone - Jews and Gentiles alike. Now, he's explaining that God has specially appointed him to share God's grace with the Gentiles.

There were more Gentiles than Jews in Ephesus, so Paul's letter is addressed specifically to the Gentiles. He wants them to understand that he's been sent by God to explain the “mystery” of Jesus and make it clear. He also wanted them to understand that he an example of God's love and grace. As a Pharisee, he used to despise Gentiles and was so evil toward Jesus followers, but now he's spreading the good news about Jesus to the Gentiles so they can be saved, too. He knew he didn't deserve this special assignment, and that's why he worked so hard to keep doing it! He was so thankful to God that even being in prison couldn't stop him from sharing God's plan with everyone.

'I am by far the least important of all the Lord's holy people. But he gave me the grace to preach to the Gentiles about the unlimited riches that Christ gives. God told me to make clear to everyone how the mystery came about. In times past it was kept hidden in the mind of God, who created all things. He wanted the rulers and authorities in the heavenly world to come to know his great wisdom. The church would make it known to them. That was God's plan from the beginning. He has fulfilled his plan through Christ Jesus our Lord.'

EPHESIANS 3:8-11 NIRV

PAUL PRAYS FOR THE EPHESIANS

Paul's letters from prison always included detailed, heartfelt prayers. In Chapter 3, he's praying that they are strengthened by the Holy Spirit and have a deep love for Christ that will keep Christ in their hearts. He prays for them to grasp how much Jesus loves them (and us), and reminds them that He's far more powerful than they (or we) can imagine. He finishes his prayer by reminding them to give God glory for everything.

'I pray that he will use his glorious riches to make you strong. May his Holy Spirit give you his power deep down inside you. Then Christ will live in your hearts because you believe in him. And I pray that your love will have deep roots. I pray that it will have a strong foundation. May you have power together with all the Lord's holy people to understand Christ's love. May you know how wide and long and high and deep it is. And may you know his love, even though it can't be known completely. Then you will be filled with everything God has for you. God is able to do far more than we could ever ask for or imagine. He does everything by his power that is working in us. Give him glory in the church and in Christ Jesus. Give him glory through all time and for ever and ever. Amen.'

EPHESIANS 3:16-21 NIRV

DISCUSSION | REVIEW

- Have you ever been given a special assignment or responsibility?
 - What did that feel like?
 - Did you finish the assignment or task?
- Read Ephesians 14-21 together from a kid-friendly Bible translation (NIRV, NIV, ICB) and as you read it, imagine that it was written for you. How does it feel to know that someone is praying for you to love Jesus and have strength from the Holy Spirit and to know that God's love is so big that we can't even really understand it?
 - Pick one of these verses and write it on something you can hang up and read every day this week.
 - Verses: 3:16, 3:18 or 3:20
- What is one thing you learned today that you can share with a friend?