

THE ORIGIN & ESSENCE OF THE CHURCH — EPHESIANS 3:1-13

1. When in your experience of the church do you feel most aware of God's presence and/or aligned to God's purposes?

As one of his last, Paul's letter to the Ephesians is key to our understanding of the church since he writes to prepare future generations to embrace their common identity and calling. This particular passage gives us one of the most expansive visions of the church in all of Paul's letters.

READ EPHESIANS 3:1-13.

PAUL'S CALLING & CIRCUMSTANCES

2. How does Paul describe himself and his calling?
3. Paul was actually in prison as he wrote this letter. How does he seem to view his circumstances? What has shaped his perspective?
4. What has been disheartening (v. 13) or wearisome as you seek to live out your faith? How does Paul's perspective challenge and encourage you?

GOD'S PLAN & THE CHURCH

5. What does the church have to do with "the mystery" (vv. 2, 6, 9) now revealed?
6. What does Paul say God is doing *through* the church? And what is the scope of this work?
7. As modern, western Christians, it can be hard to have a tangible sense of a spiritual realm (i.e., "the heavenly places" in v. 10) existing alongside our earthly experience, but it is a major theme in Ephesians (see 1:3, 20; 6:12). What do you think would change about your participation in the church if you embraced this deeper "spiritual" perspective?
8. Even though Paul talks about "the heavenly places," he sees the "manifold wisdom of God" (v. 10) expressed through concrete, earthly situations. How does unity in the church—especially across ethnic and cultural divisions (*cf.* 2:11-22)—display God's wisdom and magnify Christ's work?
9. In what relationship(s) or situation(s) do you need God's wisdom to help you pursue reconciliation and/or preserve unity

PRAY

The very next passage in Ephesians is one of Paul's "pastoral" prayers (vv. 14-21). Slowly read through this prayer to let the words of Scripture begin shaping your thoughts. You may find it helpful to read only 1-2 verses at a time, pausing in between to allow for those prayers to be expressed.