

Fresh Faith | Know Who You Are

Aaron Brockett | Ephesians 1

How is everybody doing today? It's good to see you all. I want to welcome our campuses. We are one church gathering in multiple rooms and locations in our city, so I want to say hello to you regardless of what campus you may be joining us from.

Today we are beginning a brand new series of messages that we are simply calling *Fresh Faith*. We are going to be walking our way through the New Testament book of Ephesians over the next weekends together. If you have a Bible or a Bible App you may want to go ahead and get to Ephesians 1. We're going to be looking at that today.

I've been reading this book by Daniel Pink called When. And he actually writes about when we are the most productive during our day. Scientists are examining this right now trying to figure out when we are in a better or worse mood during the day.

The research they are getting back is regardless of where you live in the world, how old you are, what language you speak, or what culture you grew up in most of us are in a good mood, or at least a better mood, and we have more energy in the morning or in the evening. But between 1-5 p.m. our mood just drops. Would that be true for any of you today listening to this? That would be true for me.

And you just see the graphs. Everybody is in a better mood, then it dips right after lunch. About 5:00 everybody's mood increases. I love what he says in the book. He says, "Don't make life-changing, critical decisions in the afternoon because you're just in a bad mood."

I think all of us probably know what that feels like, call it whatever you will: bad mood, burned out, plateau. I don't know how you are feeling right now. Maybe you're not all that excited. We're getting ready to enter into the busiest, most stressful, most wonderful times of the year right around the corner with the holidays.

I want to take a look at the content of this book called Ephesians and find out what it would look like for us to get some fresh wind, fresh faith, a fresh take in our lives.

I think David knew this feeling. In Psalm 51 David expressed this to God. He said, "Bring me back from gray exile, put a **fresh wind** in my sails."

In Ezekiel 37 God takes the prophet Ezekiel out to a valley and the valley is covered with dry bones representing the nation of Israel. They just wonder if there is any hope for them. God says this to Ezekiel in chapter 37, verse 5.

“This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Look! I am going to put **breath into you** and make you live again!”

I think all of us know what that feels like, to just be in a place where we just need a fresh wind in our lives, so to speak, and I think Ephesians gives that to us.

I also think what Ephesians can do is give us a fresh understanding of who God is and the messages and the purposes of God for our life. I think there may be any number of us who may read through this and say, “I didn’t know that was who God was. I really didn’t know that was his message and his purpose for my life.”

I think a lot of people reject God for false reasons. I had a lady say to me just recently, “I didn’t know church could be like this. I thought church was either boring or you just left feeling beat up.”

I thought, “How tragic was that?”

So the content of Ephesians can help us with both of these things. I want to look at the first couple of verses and offer a few words of introduction to this book we’re going to study together.

In verses 1 and 2 it says, “**This letter,**” and it’s a letter that Paul writes, “**is from Paul,** chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus. I am writing to God’s holy people in Ephesus, who are faithful followers of Christ Jesus. May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you **grace** and **peace.**”

So what Paul is doing is he is writing a letter to encourage his friends living in the world class city of Ephesus. Ephesus was a bit intimidating. It was very impressive. There were a lot of scholars who were living in Ephesus because it boasted one of the best libraries at the time.

They would pass through because of its strategic location. The temple of Artemis was located there, which is one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. So it was an impressive city, but it was also a corrupt city.

Sex trafficking and prostitution were common. In fact, archeologists have discovered what they believe to be an ancient brothel located right across the street from that major library, and there were tunnels under the road connecting the two.

It tells me there were a lot of people going to the library to study.

So Ephesus was corrupt, it was impressive and had all these things going on. It was a city that was really open to spirituality with 50 temples there all dedicated to different pagan gods.

Very similar to our culture today, they weren't necessarily interested in or open to Jesus. So Paul is writing to a group of friends who are living in this high-pressure, fast-paced, hostile world. And they needed a fresh word of encouragement in their lives in order to keep going.

Now why tell you all that about the city of Ephesus? Aside from just knowing the context around who this letter was written to, I also think we can come to the Bible sometimes as modern, sophisticated people thinking this was information that was written a long time ago to country bumpkins who were living out in the sticks, not really relating to us today.

But we need to understand that the vast majority of the New Testament was letters written to people like you and me that gives us information about the messages and purpose of God. And that message took root in cities. It took root in urban context where people were living in this high-pressure, fast-paced world and the message of the gospel took off like wildfire.

That's why we have a heart for the city. That's why we plant churches in cities around the globe.

So Paul writes to give them this encouragement. Whether you love the city or prefer the country, it doesn't really matter. Every single one of us is faced with this question on a regular basis. It's just the question of who am I?

It's the question of identity. I want to ask you to spend a little time with this question today and through the series. How do you answer that question? I think many times we look into the mirror to get an answer to that question. Many times we look at the person next to us, the person we are in a relationship with to get an answer to that question.

Maybe we look at what we do for a living or any number of outside external achievements. Most of those things we don't have full control over, so they are unstable at best.

So whatever it is you build your identity on, we lean our life up against it, so to speak, and it just slides out from under us. Any of those things can change. To be perfectly honest, my sense of identity can get wrapped up in how the church is doing.

When I feel like the church is doing really well and we're reaching lots of people and things seem to be going good, I can feel good about my identity. Maybe if things aren't going so well, there are some people upset or whatever, then I can feel not as good about my identity. That's a dangerous game.

Regardless of what your occupation is—maybe some of you found your identity in being a mom or being a dad—on those days when you don't feel like you are being a very good mom, your sense of identity lowers.

Maybe on those days when you feel like you are being a good one, it kind of elevates. Maybe it's just sort of like the weather. It can change in an instant.

I had a friend say to me, “Man, you’ve got to be really careful about this.” If you take credit, or if you feel good about yourself when everything is going great, then you’ll also accept too much of the blame when things aren’t going so great. And neither of these things are healthy.

So what Paul is trying to do in chapter 1 is he wants each one of us to find our identity and build our identity on something more durable and substantial than outside changing circumstances.

I can’t read through every verse in chapter 1. I would encourage you to read chapters 1 and 2 just maybe in your own personal time this week. But verses 4-14 of chapter 1, in the original Greek when Paul wrote verses 4-14, it was one long, glorious run-on sentence. English teachers hate it; theologians love it.

It’s like Paul is just like throwing it all up on us. He just wants us to know so badly how God sees us. Let me look at this one critical verse and I just want to camp on it. It’s verse 4.

Paul says, “Even before he made the world, God **loved** us and **chose** us,” and these two little words here are so important in Ephesians, “in Christ,” and that determines everything. “To be **holy** and **without fault** in his eyes.”

So here is the truth that I want you to let wash over you, whether you fully understand it or believe it. I just want you to let it sit with you.

You were chosen ***in advance***.

That’s an awesome thought. Because there really isn’t any other relationship, any other thing in life, that works that way. Right now we get our sense of achievement when we are loved, chosen, or accepted by others based upon something we do or how we perform, or what we accomplish. We are just sort of conditioned to think this way.

And the acceptance that we receive from others, even the people who love us the most, oftentimes it feels like it has conditions attached to it. It’s really difficult for us to get our heads around the fact that God’s love for us came in advance of anything we could do. It came in advance of our existence. And his love for us is unconditional.

Paul says, “God loved you and chose you before he even made the world. Before your parents thought about you, God knew you and loved you.”

Now some people look at that verse and say, “That just means God knew beforehand who would choose him.” It’s almost like God looks down the long corridor of the future and says, “I see Brockett is going to choose me one day; therefore, I choose him back.”

That’s not what this verse says. This verse says God’s love rested upon us and he chose us before the world even began and before you were a thought in your mom and dad’s mind.

How in the world does that work? I have no idea and anybody who says they do know how that works is lying. They don't know either. The fancy theological word for this is predestination, and people can get into all kind of debates over that.

Honestly, the Bible says there is a mystery to God and there are secrets only God knows. I actually find great comfort in that, because that's part of the job description for God—that he would be privy to some information I'm not. He can just understand some things I can't understand. If I could understand it, he wouldn't be God.

So we want to know how this works. I don't know how it works and I've been in fulltime ministry for 20 years. As I look back on the course of people I've been able to get to know and to work with, there are some people who I have spent so much time and energy meeting with, talking to, and having cups of coffee with.

They are asking me questions and I'm trying to answer them and lead them to Jesus. It just didn't work. I didn't convince them. They left and are no longer here.

And there are some people I feel guilty about. I haven't spent enough time with them. I meant to get together with them, but I never could. I never got around to it and I felt like I didn't explain things very well.

I come to cross paths with them in the future and I see they are in a relationship with Jesus and growing in wisdom. They are actually doing really, really well.

I'm like, "Maybe I shouldn't talk to as many people because I think I got in the way."

There are some of you in the room right now who got saved, crossed the line of faith, and you got baptized and that day it even surprised the angels. That day the angels were like, "Whoa, check that out. We didn't see that coming. God, you are showing off with them. How in the world does that work? They were showing no signs of responding to you and somehow you got a hold of their head and heart." You can't explain it, and neither can I.

But we can maybe come to this conclusion. Oftentimes God will blow your mind in order to capture your heart. That's what this truth is.

I don't know how it works and I don't need to know how it works. It's an awesome thought that God would say, "Aaron, before you could do anything for me I chose you. Aaron, before you could ever prove yourself worthy you're worthy in my eyes."

Part of the reason chapter 1 is filled with this long run-on sentence is because God is the one taking all the action. Let me just get a little bit nerdy on you. In chapter 1 there are 48 pronouns and 30 of them belong to God. There are 24 verbs or action sequences and God is responsible for 20 of them.

He blesses. He chooses. He adopts. He gives grace. He redeems and forgives. He lavishes. He makes his plans known. He unites us with Christ. He works and he guarantees.

You and I, we're only responsible for four action sequences and it is just simply this. We listen, receive, believe, and hope. Isn't that beautiful? Doesn't that just take a load off? There isn't anything about that that is performance based. There isn't anything about that based on your ability to actually prove yourself as loveable. God just says, "Would you just be the recipient of this? I just want you to hear me. I just want you to receive it as a gift. I just want you to believe, and I want you to hold onto hope."

It says, "He has chosen for us to be holy." I don't know what you think of when you hear that word holy. For me, maybe I think of perfection, somebody who doesn't do anything wrong. But that's not what it means. The word holy just means to be set apart.

In fact, just tap your neighbor on the shoulder right now and just say, "Man, you are holy." Just do it right now at all our campuses. Some of you did not believe a word of that, did you? "I'm only looking at you right now and telling you this because he told me to. You're not holy."

All it means is God chooses to say, "You are set apart." He chooses to look at you and me as faultless. I'm not faultless, and neither are you. We know that, yet he still says it to us. He says, "You are holy and faultless."

What is the determining factor there? It's these simple words: In his eyes. I didn't understand that theological truth until I had kids. There are plenty of moments when my kids are not holy and faultless, but I choose to see them in a certain way.

In fact, this is my six-year-old. Her name is Kadence. Everybody just collectively say, "Ahhh." She deserves it. She is a cutie. You can see by the look on her face she looks so innocent and pure. She is not. She is a ton of fun to be around.

My favorite story about Kadence was when she was in her final weeks of wearing diapers. She could walk around and talk to you in complete sentences, but she was still wearing diapers. I think it is because she liked having us serve her in that way.

I remember she was in the pullup diapers, the ones that have the rip-away on the side. I was trying to get them pulled up. We are sitting there. I was on my knees face to face with her and pulled up her diaper and they ripped off her and fell down around her ankles.

She looked at me and goes, "Awkward." She just kind of has this quick-witted sense of humor. She cracks me up all the time.

My wife says to me, “You know, she can get away with murder with you. She’s got you wrapped around her little finger.” I know she does. She might not be faultless but all she’s got to do is look at me with that face and in my eyes she is.

Paul says, “This is how your heavenly Father sees you.” It’s not performance based and it’s not based on your ability to be lovable. He says, “In my eyes you are set apart and you are faultless.” The truth of that has the power to change the hardest heart if you just let it wash over you.

We asked this question last week. Where is God when life falls apart? Why isn’t God responding? For many of us, we’ve rejected God because of people. People who claimed to represent God didn’t do a very good job of it so our hearts have grown hard to him.

So we choose to say he is out of touch or he doesn’t care anymore. In fact Peter actually addresses that question in 2 Peter 3:9.

“The Lord isn’t really being slow about his promise, as some people think.” In other words, where are you God in this world that is so messed up? “No, he is being **patient** for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants **everyone** to repent.”

And that word repent just means turn around and face him, turn around and run to him or turn around and head in his direction.

So for many of us we look at this world and we’re like, “God, how much more jacked up can this get? Where are you? Why don’t you intervene?”

And God’s over there going, “I want to. I’m just being patient because I’ve got some kids out there and I want them to know I love them. I’ve got some kids out there who are looking for hope. I’ve got some kids out there who are struggling. I’ve got some kids out there who are wrestling with anxiety and depression over their identity. I’m not being slow. I’m being patient.” And there is a difference.

This whole notion that God is angry, God hates certain people, God relishes the idea of certain people going to hell just isn’t true. That’s not how God sees you. God sees you as set apart, holy, and chosen. How does he do it? It’s those two little words: In Christ.

And one of the biggest hang-ups that some people have, and I just talked to somebody last week who had this question and said, “I don’t really have too much objection to what I read in the Bible. The biggest thing I can’t get over is the fact that Jesus would be the only way to God. I just can’t get my head around that because in this world of endless options, menus, and customizations, how in the world can Jesus be the only way? It just seems like cosmic arrogance to suggest that.

And I want you to know that it is not arrogance, it is humility. The reason Jesus is the way is Jesus is the one who humbled himself and went to a cross. Jesus is the only one who laid his life down so you could be reconnected to God.

So I can understand the logic behind “I just don’t understand how Jesus can be the only way,” but I can see the enemy twisting this all around. Instead of you seeing humility, you see arrogance. And how is it arrogance when Jesus says, “I’ll step forward to that when God looks at you he sees my righteousness. And I’ll become your sin so that way you can know you have been loved and chosen.”

Listen, God does not love you because of your potential. God didn’t look down the long corridor of the future into 2018 and say, “Man, I’ve got to have you on my team because you would make such a great Christian.” He didn’t look at you and go, “Man, you are a phenomenal leader. She is such a great teacher. I’ve got to have her on my team.”

God doesn’t love you because you’re lovable. God loves you because he is loving. God loves you not because of what you could do for him or what you could offer him, but because of what he desires to do for you. Let that inform your identity.

It gets even better. Check this out in verse 5.

“God decided in advance to **adopt** us into his own family by **bringing** us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.”

I love that. It’s almost like the question is why would he do this? The answer? Because he wanted to do it. He just wanted to because he would find great pleasure in doing it. And adoption is the word. God has adopted you and me into his family, and that is beautiful and helpful in helping us understand his message and his purpose for us.

Adoption means we were not part of the family, but God brought us in and made us part of the family with all of its rights and responsibilities and its inheritance attached to it. You’re his child.

I don’t know how many of you saw this video. It kind of made its rounds a few years ago. It is of this little girl whose foster parents surprised her by sharing with her that they were going to adopt her. I love her response. Take a look at this quick video.

I don’t know how many of you have seen that. I saw it a few weeks ago and have played it over and over and over. It just took my breath away. It brought tears to my eyes to see her response. Then it hit me as I was thinking about this. Do you know that word for her response in that moment? It is worship. It is this element where this girl was moved to this place and recognizing she had been adopted. I think for so many of us we’ve lost the wonder.

We’ve forgotten how lost we really were or how hopeless we were without God to the point where it just feels ho-hum. To be honest, when you walked in here today did you walk in with

that kind of expectation? Were you walking in here ready to meet and spend time with your heavenly Father?

Those of you who have adopted or know somebody who has adopted a child, are they your child? They may not share your biology or your DNA, but are they your child? Absolutely they are your child with all the rights and all of the responsibilities and all the inheritance attached to it.

And this is the word Paul chooses to describe what God has done for us. He had adopted us into the family. The biblical word is covenant.

You know that the Bible is divided into two sections. You've got the Old Testament and the New Testament. We just think that is part one and part two, but that's not what it is. The word testament is another word for covenant. It's God's old covenant and now it is his new covenant.

The old covenant was based on everything you could do to get in, and it was glaringly clear we could not achieve that whole list. The new covenant is all based on Jesus. It's all based on what he has done on our behalf to make us right with God.

So a covenant isn't a contract. A covenant is a promise. A covenant is God saying, "I'll do for you, even if you won't do for me." A covenant is, "I'm going to love you even if it kills me." And God says, "This is the kind of love I have for my kids."

The love you have for your children, if you have kids in the room today, the love you have for them I want to ask you this. Is it dependent on their behavior? You better hope not. We're all in trouble.

Let's just get real for a minute, those of you who have kids at home. What real value are they adding to your life anyway? Can we just get real for just a minute?

I'm not saying you don't love them. I'm not saying you wouldn't do anything for them. We would. But like seriously, how much weight are they really pulling around the house? Are they making more of a mess, or are they cleaning up the mess without you telling them to? Are they contributing to the family income? No.

And yet we love them. I choose to love you even if you won't. It's not based on your performance and it's not based on your attitude.

A friend of mine was telling me last week that he and his wife caught their little three-year-old girl stealing M&M's. And they were like, "This is a lifelong lesson. We can't let her get away with this."

So they sat her down and said, “Honey, you need to know that when you come to know God you want to obey his commands. When you come to know God stealing is wrong. And when you come to know God you want to be honest.”

This little three-year-old girl looked back at her mom and dad with this big smile on her face and said, “I don’t know God yet.”

Well played. Well played.

So, why do you love your kids? You love your kids based on a covenant kind of love. Here’s what this means. Whether you believe this or not, I want you to hear this truth.

You may have given up on God, but he’s not given up on you.

I don’t care what you have done. I don’t care what you are currently doing. I don’t care what’s been done to you, how you feel about yourself, where your sense of identity is coming from. You may have given up on God, but he has not given up on you.

When we are faithless, he is faithful.

Some of you here today have been thinking that your actions, behavior, and choices are what make you lovable, but not with God. God says, “Listen, you’re one of my kids and in Christ I see you holy and faultless.”

Here is a question I just sort of want you to consider today. On a scale of 1-10, how do you think God feels about you right now?

And just be honest. Most of the time this is based on how we feel about ourselves or maybe the condition of our lives or relationships. Can I just say to you in Christ the answer is always ten?

There isn’t anything you can do to make him love you less. There isn’t anything you can do to make him love you more. God chose you in advance and he loves you.

You might say, “What do I need to do?” Just listen. Just receive it. Just hold onto hope. Just believe. God has already done the heavy lifting.

I want to wrap up with these last two verses 13-14. “And when you believed in Christ, he **identified you as his own** by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. The Spirit is God’s **guarantee** that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people.”

I love this. He basically says the Spirit of God he has given to us is a guarantee he has placed within us. So you see, and maybe you’ve heard this word before, the Trinity. You’ve got God the

Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And maybe you're trying to figure out how that works. Don't try to figure out how that works, just figure out why.

So God the Father chooses you. God the Son rescues and redeems you. God the Spirit is a deposit guaranteeing he is going to come through on his promises.

It's kind of like when you buy a house and the real estate agent says to you, "Well, the seller needs some earnest money so they know you won't walk away from your promise." So you lay down some earnest money before you close into escrow.

God says, "The Holy Spirit is my deposit. It's earnest money. It's a guarantee."

How do you know God is going to come through on his promise? Because he's put the best part of himself into you. Because he's put the best part of heaven into you. And God says, "I'm going to come through on my promises."

So this whole chapter is based on your identity.

I just want to ask you this. What are you leaning your identity up against? Is it a relationship? Is it a job? Is it a role? And does it keep sliding out from under you? We have an enemy who specializes in identity theft. And he'll do everything he can to get you to either think way too highly of ourselves, or not high enough.

Both of those things will derail our lives and twist up our identity. So today the simple message and the purpose of God is he just wants to tell you who you really are. He just wants to say, "I love you and I chose you from the very beginning."

When we begin to embrace that truth, we begin, in Christ, to live *from* our identity not *for* our identity and there is a difference.

This summer there was a friend of mine who was telling me how years ago his 17-year-old son was out with a friend of his and the two of them got in trouble and got arrested. He got a phone call from the police department, "You need to get down here right away. We're still on site." I think it was some kind of vandalism or something.

He gets in the car and drives down. His heart is beating out of his chest thinking about the trouble his son got into. He pulls up on the scene. There are two police cars with the lights going. The doors to both cars are open in the back and he immediately spots his son.

He is handcuffed and had been crying. He is looking down at his feet in shame. Immediately he is upset. "What did my boy do and why is he in this situation? I raised him better than this."

And he said as he was walking towards the car he saw the father of the other boy had beat him there. He was already there and he was in front of his son chewing his son out up and down, screaming at him and cussing at him.

My friend, Chris, stopped for a moment and said, "I need to take a deep breath and think about what I'm going to say to my boy because what I'm going to say next is a pivotal moment and I want to get this right."

He walked up to his son who wouldn't even look at him. Chris just kind of bent down like this and he said, "Son, I need you to look at me." And slowly his son looked up at him, right into his eyes. And he said, "Son, I know what you've done, but it's not who you are."

And that's all he said. And he just embraced his boy because he knew that his son could get beyond that moment but what his father would say to him would be life-shaping.

Can I just say to someone here today, "God knows what you've done, but it's not who you are. God knows what's been done to you, but it's not who you are. You have a heavenly Father who chose you in advance. He loved you in advance and it's unconditional. There's been an enemy who had been hijacking your sense of identity for far too long. And it's based upon your image, how you are doing, how you are feeling."

Listen, I'm not saying those things aren't important and those emotions aren't real. I'm just saying there is a heavenly Father who wants you to grab ahold of this truth. Your identity is based on something far more stable than the emotion right in front of you, than what people say to you or how they make you feel.

I know what you've done, it's not who you are.

Father, we come to you right now and I know I need to be reminded of this truth because the word that sort of comes to mind with what I feel right now is overwhelmed. It just kind of feels like I'm running and running to stay ahead and the harder I run, the more I fall behind.

And I just think there is somebody else who feels that way too. Lord, I pray today that we would just invite your Spirit that is a guarantee of your promise into this room and into our hearts.

We don't know how it all works, but we want to listen, believe, receive, and hold onto hope. I pray in these next few moments as we reflect and take communion that you would meet us in that seat we are sitting in and do a transformational work on our identity.

I pray here in a moment we can worship like that little girl in the video when she learned she'd been adopted. May we never lose the wonder of that. Keep us on mission because there are a bunch of lost kids in the world who need to see that, hear that, and experience it.

We ask this now in Jesus' name. Amen.

