



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: Eph. 1:3-14

God's Mission Changes Everything

"Understanding mission as God-centric...reframes our understanding completely...The shift to understanding

...[it's] *God's mission & not ours...changes everything.*" [Lynette Edge, Greg. Morgan, *Partnering with God*, p. 4]

Bible Reading: Ephesians 1:3-14

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. **4** For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love **5** he predestined us for adoption to son-ship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— **6** *to the praise of his glorious grace*, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. **7** In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace **8** that he lavished on us. With all wisdom & understanding, **9** he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, **10** to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. **11** In him we [have obtained an inheritance (ESV)], having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, **12** in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be *for the praise of his glory*. **13** And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, **14** who is the deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to *the praise of his glory*.

1. Don't Dumb Down; Let's Dive Deep

a. What's wrong with the Church?

- "What ails the church...is...our poor theology...[It's] a failure to be intoxicated with the triune God." [Ross Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church*, pp. 250, 287]
- The Mission of God "makes *theology, not strategy, the first task* of [the] church...This theological priority has turned the church's attention more fully to God as triune." [Mark Love, "Missio Dei #1 (Aug. 2010) p.]
- "For...the past half-century...church leaders have turned to business & management perspectives... Organizational theories...have been adopted & applied, often without critical theological analysis, to church organizations...This practice has...contribut[ed to] the loss by many local churches...of their unique calling & mission." [Paul M. Dietterich, *Foretaste*; p. 9]

b. Deep or Shallow?

- "The W. church has alarming symptoms...[Some] think we've gotten too deep...*It's not that the evangelical church is too deep, but that its far too shallow*...Deep discipleship is about giving people more Bible, not less; more theology, not less; more spiritual disciplines, not less; more gospel, not less; more Christ, not less." [J. T. English, *Deep Discipleship*, p.]
- "*I sense a renewed hunger for theology*...Emerging generations are *starving for depth* in our teaching & preaching & will not settle for shallow answers...[Let's] make preaching theo-centric [God-centered] rather than anthropocentric [man-centered]. The seeker-sensitive movement brought great attention to...topical felt-need messages. But in many cases... we've made ourselves, rather than God, the focus of our preaching. A strong theo-centric [God-centered] approach...is exactly what emerging generations are starving for." [D. Kimball, *Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity*, p. 178]
- "We need a deeper vision...When our plans embody God's vision, & the new depth brings about the changes God intends, then we're swimming in the right direction." [C. Clark, K. Powell, *Deep Ministry in a Shallow World*, p.]

2. God's Mission for God's Glory

a. Trinity in Eternity

- "*Perichoresis* is the circulation of divine life within the Trinity in mutuality & fellowship, openness..."—M. S. D. Dreier
- Church Fathers "described...the Trinity using the image of dance or *perichoresis*...[It] suggests moving around, making room, relating to one another without losing...identity...mutuality or reciprocity." [D. Wesley, *Common Mission*, p. 105]

b. God's Mission begins in God's own Being

a. God is Missionary; Mission is God's Nature

- "Mission...derive[s] from the very nature of God."—David Bosch "*God has a mission & God is missionary*."—S. Holmes
- "Mission is a reflection of God's own nature & character, reflecting who God is from all eternity"—Stephen R. Holmes
- "God's very nature is related to mission...*God is by nature 'reaching out'* to what is not God...God is constantly being 'sent' from God's own being to humanity...The Father sent...the Son...the Father &...the Son sent...the Holy Spirit...This movement...[is] the mission of God...Mission is who God is. It is what God does..."—Michael D. Langford
- "*Mission is essential to God's very nature* & expressed in the being & actions of God...& made known by the sending of the Son & the Spirit into the world...'Mission' entails a sending & being sent. The sending of the Father & the 'sent-ness' of the Son point to the being & action of the triune God as both sender & sent. *Mission is an attribute of God & thus descriptive of God's very nature*...[it's] an essential aspect of the divine nature." [John R. Franke, *4 Views on...Church's Mission*, p.]

b. Enlarging the Triune Fellowship

- "The Son's primary mission is to communicate himself—his Spirit, his resurrection life—to others & so *enlarge the circle of triune fellowship* to include creation...The Father sends the Son...the Father sends the Spirit... The *purpose of the two missions...is communion & community: a sharing in...the very life of God*. The overarching plan...made known in Christ—is 'to gather everything together in Christ' (Eph. 1:10)." [Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, p. 70]

c. Inviting a Response (Re 22:17)

- “On the cross the ‘dancing circle’ of self-giving & mutually-indwelling divine persons opens up...the movement stops for a brief moment & a fissure appears so that sinful humanity can join in.” [Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, p. 129]
- “Both the Spirit & the bride say, ‘Come!’ Let anyone who hears, say, ‘Come!’ Let the one who is thirsty come. Let the one who desires take the water of life freely.” (Rev. 22:17)
- “The scope of the [God’s mission] is all-encompassing. The triune God freely created the world out of love and for participation in the divine *perichoretic* love. This [is] God’s purpose for creation; *that creation will respond & participate* in the divine nature.” [Adam Dodds, *Mission of the Triune God: Trinitarian Missiology...*, p. 99]

c. The Church joins God’s Mission

- “The Trinity is, *by nature*, ‘sending.’ The Father *sends* the Son into the world to save it, & the Father & the Son *send* the Spirit into the world...Now...the Spirit is sending the church. [Yet,] God does not merely send the church...*God already is in mission, & the church must join him.*” [Tim Keller, *Center Church*, p. 251]
- “The church...is sent...not only to proclaim the gospel but to bear in its own life the presence of the kingdom...Paul wanted the communities he addressed not merely to *believe* the gospel, but to *become* the gospel & in so doing participate in the... mission of God.” [John R. Franke, in J. S. Sexton (ed.) *4 Views on the Church’s Mission*, p.]
- “*The mission of the church is to join in the triune mission...*The church is to participate & display...the [Father’s] love...for the Son &...the obedience the Son shows the Father...The goal of these missions—of Son & Spirit...& of the church—is the sharing of the triune life: fellowship with God...[as] a community of truth & love.” [K Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, p 72]

d. God’s Mission in Ephesians

- “According to Paul, *God is on a mission* to liberate humanity—&...the entire cosmos—from the powers of Sin & Death...through the...death & resurrection of His Son...so that a newly-created humanity...is released to praise God in community...The church is a living [exposition] of the gospel of God...*The church...lives the story, tells the story...*as it participates in the life of God—Father, Son, & Spirit.” [Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, pp. 24, 43]

3. The Goal is God’s Glory (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14; 3:21)

- “There is one mission shared by each person of the Trinity *to glorify the triune God*...The church was redeemed for this purpose, & the church’s mission is to participate in this God-glorifying mission.” [Keith Whitfield, “*Triune God: God of Mission*,” in Bruce R. Ashford (ed.) *Theology & Practice of Mission*, p. 27]

a. “To the Praise of God’s Glory” (Ps. 19:1; 96:7-8; Is. 6:3; Hab. 2:14; Eph. 1:6, 12, 14)

- God’s “glory...is the ultimate goal of everything. God created the world for his own glory. Everything he made reflects the glory of his being & character. ‘The heavens declare the glory of God & the expanse proclaims his handiwork.’ (Ps. 19:1). The angels in Isaiah’s vision of God cry, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Armies; May his glory fill the whole earth.’ (Is. 6:3). God designed the human race to glorify him, ‘Ascribe to the LORD, you families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory & strength; ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name...’ (Ps. 96:7-8)...The final objective of...the triune God in redeeming fallen people, Paul argues is ‘to the praise of his glory’ (Eph. 1:13-14). The redeemed [should] ‘do everything for the glory of God’ (1 Cor. 10:31)...Ultimately the destiny of creation is that ‘the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD’s glory, as the water covers the sea.’ (Hab. 2:14)...The mission of God has God himself as its center and focal point and consuming passion. ‘From him & through him & to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.’ (Rom. 11:36)” [Keith Whitfield, “*Triune God: God of Mission*,” in Bruce R. Ashford (ed.) *Theology & Practice of Mission*, pp. 49-50]
- Two keys to Eph. 1:3-14: “[1.] Paul’s distinctive phrase...‘*in Christ*.’ [2.] Equally significant is *the God-centeredness of the whole passage*, marked...by the repeated...‘*to the praise of his glory*’ (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14).” [J. Dunn, *Beginning from p. 1109*]
- “The [end-time] people of God have one primary function *to be the praise of the glory of God* (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14).” [I. Ninan, “*Spirit & Mission in Ephesians*,” in R. T. George (ed.) *Holy Spirit & Christian Mission*, pp. 40-41]
- “The emphasis from the 1st verse to the last is on the all-powerful sovereignty of ...God & the overflowing abundance of his grace & *directed toward ‘the praise of his glorious grace’* (Eph. 1:6).”

[David I. Starling, *Not My People*, p. 187]

b. **“To him [God] be glory in the church”** (Eph. 3:21)

- “*To him [God] be glory in the church* & in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever & ever. Amen.” (Eph. 3:21)
- “Eph. 3:21...is the only place in the NT that mentions the *glory of God ‘in the church’*.” –Tim Gombis
- “God’s purpose [is] that His church reflect His image...Ultimately, [God’s] church exists for the glory of God...God desires His church to relish in His glory, share His glory among the nations, and reflect His glory in word & deed. *The church is... made in His image, sent on His mission, to be His glory.*” [Milfred Minatrea, *Shaped By God’s Heart*:... pp.]

4. Man-Centered or God-Centered?

- “Modern culture generally & American culture in particular are committed to...individual autonomy with consequences...utterly antithetical to the theo-centric [God-centered] perspective.” [H Beckley, *Gustafson’s Theo-centric Ethics*, p 144]
- There’s “a...danger...in a church [being] anthropocentric [man-centered] rather than theo-centric [God-centered]—i.e., centered on people rather than God.” [John H. Harbison, *Keeping Christ in Ministry* (2012) p.]
- God’s mission brings us to “his church, where Christ’s self-giving love &...life-giving resurrection power are experienced...The ultimate focus of this saving event is [God-centered]...(Eph. 2:7)” [M. Gorman, *Apostle of ...Crucified Lord*, p. 589]
- “The *missio Dei* [‘mission of God’] concept...shifted...the source of mission from an ecclesio-[church-centered] or anthropocentric [man-centered] source to a theo-centric [God-centered] source, the Triune Godhead. This was a major (& contested) theological advance.” [Mark Liang, “*Missio Dei*: Some Implications for the Church,” *Missiology* (2009)]
- The ‘Mission of God’ is “a profoundly [God-centered] re-conceptualization of Christian mission... Mission is not merely an activity of the church; rather, mission is the result of God’s initiative, rooted in God’s purposes to restore & heal creation.” [Darrell Guder in Craig Ott (ed.) *Mission of the Church: Five Views*, p.]

5. The Trinity isn’t Selfish or Self-centered

- “*Is the God of the Bible Selfish?:* Can the God of Scripture truly be love yet also desire his own glory?...According to skeptic John Stuart Mill, God does every day that for which he regularly condemns man. For many others...God is the paradigm of selfishness ...*If God were only one person*, it’d be difficult to avoid the conclusion that...while we are not to be selfish, God himself is absolutely selfish.” [J. Scott Horrell, “*Self-Giving Triune God...& the Nature of the Local Church*,” Bible.org]
- “The question of why God created is not easily answered, apart from the classical Christian response, ‘to the praise of his glory’ (Eph. 1:12, 14). Some deduce that the divine motivation for creation is best found in the overflow of loving self-giving-ness between the 3 persons of the Godhead. The deep love, goodness & joy of each member of the Trinity toward the other spills forth in the creation of that which is external to God, the realms of angels & mankind. As such, all creation exists & is sustained, not by necessity *nor by divine selfishness*, but by the abundance of Trinitarian grace.” [J. Scott Horrell, “*In The Name Of The Father, Son & Holy Spirit*,” Bible.org]
- God not selfish: “A significant characteristic of the Christian God...is love. Divine love...defines the intra-Trinitarian relations...God is love, each person of the Trinity loves not so much himself but especially the other 2 persons. As defined in 1 Cor. 13, love by nature is not directed inwardly but outwardly...in the sharing & giving of oneself to the other. In contrast to Islam, Judaism & other religions which defend God as exclusively one person, the *Triune God of the Bible cannot be accused of selfishness or egocentrism. Nor is this God lonely*, needing someone to love, or with whom to communicate or to actualize himself reciprocally as Person.” [J. Scott Horrell, “*In The Name Of The Father*,” Bible.org]
- “In God’s own revelation, we encounter a Father, Son & Holy Spirit each *loving* the other, *giving* to the other, *honoring* the other, *glorifying* the other —this without confuse[on]...*Is the God of the*

Bible selfish? Quite the contrary. We discover that the 3-personed God of Scripture is profoundly & infinitely self-giving. *The God of Love in calling for glory is not necessarily selfish at all.* His glory is a shared glory, each delighting in the other...Far from being selfish, the tri-personal God of the Bible reveals the most profound depths of self-giving. Each member of the Godhead freely gives of himself to the other, delighting in glorifying the other. God is love." [J. Scott Horrell, "*Self-Giving Triune God*," Bible.org]

6. God's Church on God's Mission in God's Way for God's Glory (Re 21:23)

- God's mission "remains an action of God's own...life. He has *not simply handed this over to...the Christian community...* [It's] *not some...missionary carte blanche where everything is permitted for the sake of...church growth.* It does not allow for communities...which simply replicate local patterns." [John G. Flett, "*Theology of missio Dei*," pp. 75-76]
- A "*perichoresis...exists among the persons of the Trinity...The church, when it reflects God's glory,* likewise participates in this unity. The church...is a finite and temporal echo of the eternal community that God is."—Gailyn Van Rheenen
- "The city [Jerusalem] does not need the sun or moon to shine on it, because the *glory of God* illuminates it." (Rev. 21:23)
- *God's mission in the world is related to the reign (kingdom) of God.* This reign encompasses all that God has planned since the beginning for...his rule through human beings to the entire earth, begun in Genesis 1...& fulfilled in Jesus' return & in a city ['New Jerusalem'] in which nature & culture are blended, completed, & *filled with the presence & glory of God.* [Rick Richardson, "*Emerging Missional Movements...Assessment...*," IBMR, Vol. 37, #3 (July 2013) p. 131]

SUMMARY:

Commentators say Christianity in North America is too shallow; it's 'a mile wide, but only an inch deep.' They prescribe a deeper engagement with the Trinity—God the Father, the Son & Holy Spirit. Current COVID restrictions afford us a golden opportunity for a deeper dive. Today's topic, '*God's Mission Changes Everything*,' points the way. God's mission begins in God's own being in eternity; God is 'missionary' by nature—reaching out to enlarge the community of the Trinity. Ephesians 1 tells how God's mission reached us to change our identity & destiny. Now we are God's people, the church, invited into God's mission, issuing in the praise of God's glory. Exalting, adoring anything or anyone else disappoints; glorifying God fulfills.

QUESTIONS:

1. Was there ever a time in your Christian life when you felt God calling you to go deeper? How did you respond?
2. In the past 6 months of COVID pandemic how has your Christian life changed? Any new experiences, leadings?
3. In your own personal history as a Christian, how has the Trinity (triune God) been taught & discussed?
4. In your own history, what (if anything) has motivated you to think (or investigate) about the Trinity?
5. In the terms—"God's mission," "mission of God," what do you understand by "*mission*"? What words would you suggest as substitutes for "mission"?
6. Traditionally many Christians said 'mission' starts in Mt. 28:19—"Go & make disciples..." What difference does it make to say, "God's Mission begins in the triune God's own being in eternity"?
7. Where do you see God's mission in Eph. 1:3-14? How do you relate the whole passage to God's mission?
8. 2 scholars wrote: "The shift to understanding...[it's] *God's mission* & not ours...*changes everything.*" That's a major claim; what might they mean? What item springs to your mind that's changed by seeing "it's *God's mission...not ours*"?

9. Eph. 1:3-14 says God's actions are for the "*praise to his glory.*" The Bible says we shouldn't be self-centered; Jesus said "I don't seek my own glory" (Jn. 8:50). How then could God "seek His own glory"? Is God "selfish"/"self-centered"?
10. The NT says "*To [God] be glory in the church*" (Eph. 3:21); what would that look like? How can the church glorify God?