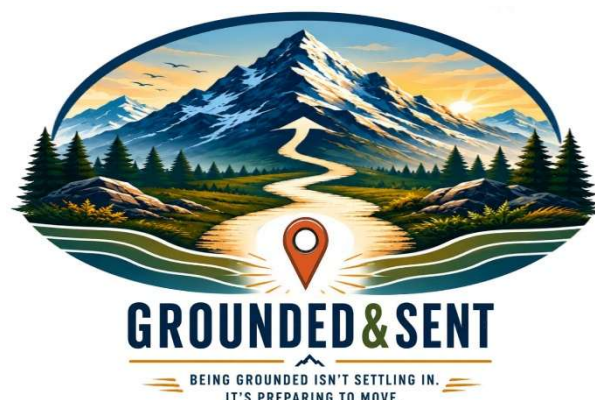


“Chosen Before You Knew It”

Session 1: Ephesians 1:1-14



Movement: Grounded

Theme: Transformation begins with identity, not effort.

Leader's Notes:

Remember our goal is 100% participation – everyone talks.

Prioritize ★ questions. These make up the central theological themes. In time constraints unstarred questions can be skipped. A great conversation on two or three questions is better than a rushed one on five.

This session sets the foundation for the entire series. Before Paul tells the Ephesians how to live, he spends fourteen verses telling them who they are: chosen, adopted, redeemed, and sealed by the Spirit. That order matters. Everything in Grounded & Sent assumes this starting point: transformation doesn't begin with effort. It begins with identity.

Your group doesn't need to walk away from tonight understanding predestination or adoption theology. They need to walk away asking an honest question: Am I living like someone who is fully loved, or am I still trying to earn what God has already given me? That tension... between performing and resting... is the heartbeat of this conversation. Don't be afraid of silence after the harder questions. This session works best when people feel safe enough to be honest about where they actually stand with God, not where they think they're supposed to stand.

SESSION 1 ONLY: Queue up The Bible Project's Ephesians overview video before your group arrives: youtube.com/watch?v=Y71r-T98E2Q. It runs ~8-9 minutes and sets up the whole letter. Play it before the icebreaker. If tech fails, skip it and add 2 minutes to Open It.

OPEN IT | Icebreaker • ~6 minutes

Leader note: One question, two or three responses, keep it light. The goal is warmth and a little laughter coming off the video. Don't push for depth here. That's what the rest of the session is for.

1. When you were growing up, was there a label or reputation that followed you around? Ex: the funny one, the responsible one, the troublemaker, the quiet one, etc. Did it fit? Did you choose it?

Let this be fun. People often have great stories about nicknames or family roles that stuck. The point isn't to go deep. It's to surface the idea that other people's words shape how we see ourselves. That idea becomes important the moment you open the Bible text.

READ IT | Scripture • ~6 minutes

Leaders Note: Read the passage in two parts. Read verses 1–2 yourself as a brief setup. Then ask a volunteer to read verses 3–14. After the reading, resist the urge to explain, and instead move straight into Question 2. Let the text land before anyone interprets it.

- Ephesians 1:1-2

Leaders Note: Paul is writing from prison (probably Rome, around AD 60-62). He's addressing a church in one of the most powerful, religiously charged cities in the Roman Empire. Ephesus had wealth, status, competing gods, and constant pressure to perform and belong. Sound familiar? Paul's letter enters that world with a radically different message about where identity comes from. You don't need to say all of this. The video covered it. Just keep it in mind.

- Ephesians 1:3-14

EXPLORE IT | Discussion • ~28 minutes

2. Paul writes this entire passage (this explosion of praise) from a prison cell. He's not writing from a good season. What do you observe about Paul's attitude while in prison?

Let people feel the context before they analyze the content. Paul's circumstances should bother us a little... or at least make us curious. Some people will respond with admiration, some with skepticism, some with quiet conviction about their own complaints. All of those responses are worth a brief moment. Don't stay

here long. This is a door-opener, not the main conversation. One or two responses, then move on.

Sticky phrase: (Use these to help your group remember what they learn) **“What you do in the hard places reveals what you actually believe in the easy ones.”**

★ 3. Think about how you actually talk to God on a normal day... not how you're supposed to, but how you actually do. Is it more like approaching a generous Father, or like you're trying to stay in good standing with a demanding boss? Where did that posture come from?

This is the relational core of the session. Paul opens by declaring that God has already blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ... not some blessings, not the blessings we've earned, every blessing. But most Christ followers don't live from that reality. They live in a subtle deficit posture... trying to earn, maintain, or recover standing with God. This question surfaces that honestly. Let people answer from real experience. You'll likely find most of your group somewhere between the two options, and that's the honest starting point for the whole series.

Sticky phrase: **“You can't live like someone who is fully loved if you're still trying to become someone worth loving.”**

★4. Paul says God chose us before the world began... before we existed, before we had a single thing to offer. If someone chooses you before you've done anything, what does that tell you about why they chose you?

*Warning – Don't let this turn into a predestination debate. Redirect by saying something like: “That's a real conversation that scholars have debated for centuries, and it's worth having, but notice that Paul's concern here is not how we are chosen, but simply “that” we are chosen.

This is a deceptively simple question that does a lot of theological work quietly. If someone chooses you before you've done anything, the only possible explanation is that the choice says something about the chooser and not the chosen. That's Paul's entire point. God's choice of us isn't a response to what he saw in us. It's a revelation of who he is. Let the group reason their way there without rushing them. Some people will land on “it means they really love you.” Some will say “it means you didn't earn it.” Both are right and worth affirming.

What you're listening for is the moment someone realizes that this kind of choice can't be un-done by performance/sin either. It was never based on performance in the first place. That's the turn. If the group doesn't get there on their own, a simple follow-up gets you there: "And if that's why he chose you, what could ever change that?"

If the group struggles to answer this, ask if anyone has experienced being chosen before they had anything to offer, and then then bridge from there: 'What made that feel different from being chosen for a reason? Now multiply that by infinity.'

Sticky phrase: **"God's choice of you says everything about who He is and nothing about what you've done."**

5. Is there an area of your life right now where you're still performing... trying to earn approval, prove your worth, or stay in someone's good graces? What would it look like to bring that same energy into your relationship with God?

This is the application pivot. It takes the theological reality of the passage and asks where it intersects with real life. Performance and approval-seeking aren't just spiritual problems, they show up in relationships, work, parenting, and friendships. Let people answer from wherever feels most alive for them. The connection back to the passage is this: if God has already given us every spiritual blessing, chosen us, adopted us, and sealed us with his Spirit... then performing for his approval isn't humility. It's amnesia. We've forgotten what we already have.

Sticky phrase: **"Striving for what you already possess isn't faithfulness. It's forgetting."**

★6. Verse 5 says God adopted every Christ follower as a full heir... chosen, redeemed, sealed. The person next to you carries that identity. So does the difficult person at work, the family member who frustrates you, the stranger in line at the grocery store. If you saw every one of them that way, how would you interact with them differently? Think of someone specific. Who is it, and what would it look like to treat them according to who they actually are in Christ?

This question does two things at once. It takes the personal identity work of the earlier questions and pushes it outward into relationships, and it asks for enough specificity that people can't stay abstract. "Someone at work" is easy to say and easy to forget. A name (even one kept private) creates accountability. Don't force

anyone to share who they're thinking of, but encourage people to name it to themselves if not to the group. You may find that some people immediately think of someone difficult... a relationship with real friction. That's exactly right. The point isn't that this is easy. It's that the identity Paul describes makes a demand on how we treat people whether we feel like it or not. If the room gets quiet after this question, let it. Quiet usually means someone is thinking of a real person, and that's the whole point. This question also sets up the "Speak Identity Over Someone" Do It option directly. If someone names a person here, nudge them toward that application choice before you close.

Sticky phrase: **"You can't fully receive an identity you're unwilling to extend to someone else."**

SAY IT | *Leader Teaching • ~3 minutes*

LEADER NOTE: Read the following aloud or put it in your own words. This is a brief bridge between the discussion and the application... not a sermon. Two minutes is plenty.

Here's what's easy to miss about this passage: Paul doesn't start by telling us what to do. He starts by telling us who we are. The whole second half of Ephesians, the practical stuff about relationships, community, and how to stand firm is built entirely on this foundation. You can't live differently until you see yourself differently, and Paul's picture of who we are is not modest. Chosen before the world began. Adopted as full heirs. Redeemed at great cost. Sealed by the Spirit of God as a guarantee of what's coming. That's not a list of goals. That's a description of who you already are in Christ... right now, today, whatever your week looked like. So, as we move into this series together, here's the question underneath everything: What would change about the way you live if you actually believed that? Not just knew it, but believed it... staked your week on it. That's what Grounded & Sent is trying to find out.

DO IT | *Application • ~8 minutes*

LEADER NOTE: Don't skip this or rush it. Ask everyone to pick one option and say it out loud before you close. That small act of commitment makes follow-through significantly more likely. Open next week's session by checking in: "Did anyone try their thing? How did it go?" Keep it light. This isn't a performance review, it's a conversation.

Choose one of the following this week:

- **The Two Lists.** Write down five words you'd use to honestly describe yourself right now... not the Sunday morning version, the real one. Then, open Ephesians 1:3–14 and write five words Paul uses to describe who you are in Christ. Sit with the gap between those two lists. Bring it to God.
- **Say It Out Loud.** Every morning this week, before you check your phone, say this out loud: "I am chosen, adopted, redeemed, and sealed. I don't need to earn what I already have." Say it even if you don't fully feel it yet. Especially then.
- **Speak Identity Over Someone.** Find one person this week... a family member, a friend, someone at Brazos Pointe... and tell them something true about who they are. Not what they did. Who they are. Practice speaking identity over someone the way Paul does in this passage.
- **Reflect On It.** Read Ephesians 1:3–14 slowly, one verse at a time. After each verse, complete this sentence: "Because of this, I am ____." Let the text name you for a few minutes and see what it surfaces.

PRAY IT | *Closing Prayer • ~3 minutes*

LEADER NOTE: Read this prayer over your group, or use it as a guide after open prayer. It's written in the language of the passage to reinforce what was discussed. If your group tends to spend a long time on prayer requests, plan to use this as a gentle closing after a shorter time of open prayer.

Father, thank you that before we did anything... before we chose you, before we got it right, before we even knew your name, you had already chosen us. We confess that we spend more energy performing for your approval than resting in what you've already declared over us. Today we heard it again: we are chosen, adopted, redeemed, and sealed. We are yours... not because we earned it, but because you willed it. Would you let that truth travel from our heads to the places in us that still don't quite believe it? This week, may we live like people who have nothing left to prove. In Jesus' name, Amen