

## **Living For God's Glory**

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Rich Nathan

January 6-7, 2001

"I Believe In The Church" Series

Ephesians 1:1-10

I am going to begin a new series for the New Year from the book of Ephesians – a series that I am titling, "I Believe in the Church." My title is borrowed from the end of the Nicene Creed, a creed that was hammered out in that great church council that met in the city of Nicea in the year 325 to set the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy. In the Nicene Creed, of course, the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ was clearly expressed – that Christ was of one substance with the Father.

But toward the end of the Nicene Creed, after the church expressed its faith in God the Father, in God the Son, and in God the Holy Spirit, the early church said, "I believe in one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church." In other words, I believe in one universal church, that's what the word "Catholic" originally meant. It didn't mean Roman Catholic. The word "Catholic" originally meant universal. All Christians are part of one church, a holy church, a universal church, an apostolic church. Christians are people who not only believe in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, but Christians from the earliest days of Christianity have also said "I believe in the church."

Today there are lots of folks who consider themselves Christians, but don't believe in the church. They are turned off by the church. They say they aren't into institutional religion. They find their spiritual needs met by watching Christian television or meeting with a Christian friend.

The book of Ephesians in the apostle Paul's great affirmation of the statement "I believe in the church." We are going to find as we read through the book of Ephesians that being a Christian was never meant to be an individual sport. It is not like figure skating in the Olympics or tennis or golf. The book of Ephesians communicates over and over again that Christianity is a team sport. It is like football, basketball or baseball. I believe in the church. That's what a Christian needs to say along with "I believe in Christ." The church with all of its flaws. The church with all of its mistakes. I believe in the church.

Now listen, the universal church, this one holy Catholic and Apostolic church, expresses itself locally through different denominations, different groups. So here in Columbus we have an expression of the universal church through the local manifestation of the Lutheran church and the Methodist church and the Presbyterians and Grace Brethren, Xenos, World Harvest.

Through this series I hope to communicate to you what we are trying to do here at the Vineyard church. As the church has grown and we have moved into this

new facility, some of our old timers have wondered, “What does it mean for us now? Does the change of facility mean a change of vision, a change of direction? What kind of church are we building here?” Newcomers ask the same thing. What does it mean to be part of the local expression called Vineyard Columbus? What is unique about how you express Christianity, what you do?

I thought it would be really nice to talk about the vision of this church against the backdrop of Paul’s great treatise on the church. What we are going to find in the opening verses of Ephesians 1 is that the apostle Paul sets his great teaching of the church against the even bigger canvas of the ultimate purpose of all of existence, which is to live for the glory of God. I have called today’s talk, “Living for God’s Glory.” Let’s pray.

I am going to read Ephesians 1:1-10:

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 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. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.*

I don’t know how many of you have ever been to Disneyland or DisneyWorld – probably quite a few. But they have this ride in Disneyland and DisneyWorld called “It’s a Small World.” I rode it years ago, but you ride in this little train and basically you got in these cars and went through this exhibit that had dancing dolls from different culture – dancing Eskimos, dancing Indians, dancing South American children. And for the length of the ride, which I think was 5-10 minutes, they played the same tune over and over again. “It’s a small, small world.” A hundred times; a thousand times – it’s a small, small world. In Japanese, in Swahili, in Russian – over and over again until the tune was imprinted on your brain. And the only thing you could hear in the background of your head for the next week was that stupid song. In your dreams someone would be singing in Chinese, “It’s a small, small world.” In Italian, when you woke up, “It’s a small, small world.” You think we play the Vineyard choruses endlessly because we sing the same refrain 3-4 times? We have nothing on Disney. We are rank amateurs. You have to do it 700 times, 800 times. It’s a small, small world.

Do you know that most people live in very small worlds? They live very little lives in very small worlds. Some time ago I visited a friend whose entire life is centered on collecting baseball cards. Here's this 50 year old guy and so far as I can tell, apart from working, the only thing that he does is collect baseball cards. Five minutes after I entered his home, he began pulling down boxes of his cards. He showed me the borders of the cards and how some of them were in chrome – the Chrome Series; and the Silver Series; how the cards were numbered. He had the Rookie Series and the Topps Series and the Donruss Series and the 50 other card companies. All of his good cards were in hard plastic. He spends over a \$1000 a year just in plastic holders. He said sometimes he sets his computer for 4:00 a.m. in the morning when he can surf the web for the best deals on a particular baseball card.

Now, I like baseball cards I think as much as the next guy. I love baseball. But I found the whole experience with my friend to be profoundly sad. What a small world, what a small little constricted life. He didn't live in the world of relationships, a world of making a real difference with your life, a world where you get to help someone else, where you make things a little bit better for others. What's he got to show for his life at the end of his life? What's he got? Boxes and boxes of baseball cards.

Sadly, most people live pretty small lives, lives centered on collecting stuff, more and more little things. In Yiddish, Jews call them chatkes. Little Hummels that you place around your house. Such small little lives – years and years and years spent fixing up your house. Thousands and thousands of hours spent shopping looking for clothes, trying on clothes, touching clothes, shopping for clothes, looking for one more antique that you can stick in a corner of your bathroom for that one three inch space between the toilet tank and the corner.

Little lives made even smaller by thousands of hours in front of a TV set or surfing the web or living vicariously through some actor or actress. Who really cares who Meg Ryan is dating? Who is this person and why do we care? And yet Meg Ryan's face is splashed on every cover of every tabloid as you go through the supermarket check out line.

Small worlds and small lives. Lives centered entirely on work.

The plan of the enemy is to shrink your life down to the vanishing point as your life gets progressively over time smaller and smaller and smaller until you virtually disappear. And do you know what the plan of God is? The plan of God is exactly the reverse. It is to give you an ever increasing, abundant, expansive, bigger life. The word "oppressed" carries with it the notion of shrinking, of constriction, of being squeezed into a very tight space. When someone is oppressed, literally what is happening is that their life is shrinking. Do you know what it is to be saved? Salvation carries with it being brought to a big place, a wide space, a place where you can breathe and grow and expand.

The biggest lie the enemy has ever sown is that becoming a Christian is like a straitjacket. It makes you smaller and more constricted and more oppressed. And that when you throw off Christianity you become free.

Nothing could be further from the truth. To be saved finally gives a person breathing room. When God begins to operate in your life, his goal is to give you a bigger life. Now, a big life comes from having a big purpose. A great life comes from having a great purpose for life – a purpose that goes beyond collecting baseball cards or filling your house with little chatkes or shopping, or working on getting a better body.

The apostle Paul in the first 14 verses speaks to us about God's great purpose three times. In verse 6, "To the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves."

Verse 12, "In order that we who were the first in Christ might be for the praise of his glory."

Verse 14, "The promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory."

To the praise of his glory. To the praise of his glory. To the praise of his glory. To the praise of his glory.

What is God's great purpose? To have people live for his glory above everything else. In other words, to have people value God above everything else that they value in life. Above baseball cards, above chatkes, above your own promotion at work, above your salary – that life would be lived for God, for God's honor, for God's purposes. The great Reformation phrase was "solideo Gloria," for the glory of God alone, all that God does in creating, in redeeming, in adopting, in forgiving us – all that he does, he does for his own glory. For his own name. For his own praise.

Now, listen real closely to what I am about to say. A lot of Christians have heard the message that they are to live for the glory of God – you are to live for God, to prize God, to love God, to honor God above everything else. But the way that that gets translated down in local churches is that you glorify God most by doing things for God. By being active and productive and running around serving and giving. Sometimes it gets translated in a very crass way – since God has done so much for you, he gave his Son to die for you, can't you do something for God?

Sometimes since you are to live for God's glory, what is it that you are going to do that is really great for God? Become a missionary? Give up your job and

become a pastor? What great sacrifice can you make for God in order for you to glorify him?

What we discover, and especially in this first portion of Ephesians, and this is what I want you to hear – God is not most glorified by what you do for him, rather God is most glorified what you let God do for you. It is not what you do for God that brings him the most honor. What brings God the most honor is what you let God do for you. God's plan, God's purpose is to have people stop trusting in themselves – in all of your own self-help ways to find meaning in life – instead, God's purpose is to have you trust in what God does for you.

God's not asking what difference are you going to make for him? Some man-centered, human-centered kind of message – that's not the Good News message of the Gospel. The Good News of the Gospel is what difference will you allow God to make for you? That God exists, that God is good, that God yearns to save you and change you and bless you. What difference does that message make in your life? How much room will you give God? That's what brings God glory. Not will you meet one of God's needs. But God is most glorified when you allow him to meet your needs, instead of rushing toward some cheap substitute, some counterfeit, to find your satisfaction in God alone, that brings glory to God.

This glory can be multiplied as you assist other people to find their life satisfaction in God, rather than in all the other trivial pursuits that people give themselves to. As you assist people to return and to repent from their ever shrinking constricted lives to a life that is big and expansive, abundant and full, God is glorified. We glorify God by allowing God to meet our needs and we glorify God when we meet other people's needs and they praise God on your behalf.

Isn't it an extraordinary thing to imagine that someone would say, "Thank you, God, praise you God," because of the difference that you have made in their lives. That even the angels in heaven would increase their worship of God because of you.

That's what happened as a result of Jesus' life and ministry all the time. Everywhere he went, he left in his wake a trail of people who were thanking God because of Christ. When people were healed, when people were taught, when people were cared for, loved and forgiven, their reaction was to thank God for the life of Jesus.

Wouldn't you want that? Wouldn't that be an incredible thing to be said about you? I mean what higher compliment could there ever be than for someone to come up to you and say, "I praise God that you are a part of my life? I am grateful to God because of your ministry, because of your love. I praise God because you take time to teach one of my children. You are responsible for

leading one of my kids to Christ and I thank God on your behalf.” Is that not what you want to live for?

One of the physicians in this church is taking a few weeks off from her job as an obstetrician to travel by herself to Pakistan where she will work for a couple of weeks in a hospital caring for Muslim women who have no medical treatment. Why do that? Why take a couple of weeks off from a lucrative practice as a physician, travel halfway around the world to some third world village, where you could get sick, you could get malaria. Why do that?

I know what her motivation is. She is a dear friend. I know what her motivation is. It is so that Muslim women would praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ on her behalf. That one woman would turn to Christ, there the glory of God is multiplied.

You know when you love someone just a little bit, it is so wonderful when other people say nice things about them. I love when people come up to me and say something kind about my daughter or my son. Or they tell me that they are really blessed by hearing my wife teach. I love it.

And one of the ways that you and I get to express our love for God is by living so that other people could praise him on our behalf. It is really nice if someone compliments you, but it is so much better if someone compliments Jesus because of you.

For the praise of his glory. For the praise of his glory. For the praise of his glory. That's the big purpose.

Now, what we find in Ephesians 1:3 where Paul says, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” all the way through verse 14, “Who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory” is one long run-on sentence in Greek. Twelve verses from verse 3-14 in the original Greek forms one incredibly complex sentence. A lot of folks say, “Read Ephesians 1” a lot of folks say, “I can't sort through all of this.” Well, no wonder. Paul is bursting out in praise like a waterfall that is cascading down – clause upon clause, phrase upon phrase, praise upon praise, one thought leading to another. And all of this praise, this extended blessing, it is all to God.

Why does Paul say “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ?” Because God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. Because God has chosen us in him before the creation of the world. Because God predestined us to be adopted. Because God redeemed us through the blood of Christ. Because God forgave us. He blesses, he chooses, he predestined, he lavishes, he makes known, he accomplishes. The Christian life is all about what God does on our behalf.

Let me put it slightly differently. A lot of people think that if they become Christians, they have to give up a lot. Basically to become a Christian is to amputate some limb or to cut off the real fun you are having. Talk with a young person about turning to Christ and they say, "I don't know if I want to become a Christian because that means I have to give up so much fun."

What the apostle Paul is trying to drive home here in verse 3-14 and what the entire Bible announces to us as Good News boils down to three basic propositions – three things: 1) Only God can meet your needs; 2) You must give up your counterfeit approaches to meeting your needs. Your approaches will never work. 3) If you let God meet your needs, you bring him glory. Only God can meet your needs. You have to give up your counterfeit ways of meeting your needs; they will never work. And if you let God meet your needs, you will bring him glory.

The problem that people have is not that they want too much out of life and that Christ demands this great sacrifice. The problem with people is that they want too little. That we are satisfied with little lives and small worlds and we don't choose for big lives in a big world.

What is it that God does for us? We need love. We need to know that we are special to someone. That someone really cares for us, not because of what we do for them, but because we are who we are – good or bad, success or failure. Everyone of us needs to know that someone loves us when we screw up, when we succeed, when we are in the valley, when we are on the mountain, when we are depressed, when we are elated. We need to know that we are valued and precious and that we are loved.

Look at what it says about our God. "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." What are the blessings that the Christian finds in Christ?

The blessing of having our need for love met. Verse 4, "for he chose us in him before the foundation of the world." There are so many counterfeits, so many ways that people go about seeking love, this essential need to know that somebody somewhere out there cares for me. And all of our counterfeits shrink our lives down, make our world smaller. Some of you are madly pursuing having a boyfriend or girlfriend. You're boy crazy or girl crazy. You feel like you can't exist happily unless you are attached to someone. Your girlfriends all have boyfriends and you need one too. Everyone around you is getting paired up and getting engaged and getting married. You believe that you can't find real satisfaction and contentment unless you find someone great. All of these are counterfeits for the love that God has for us.

I think of a person who falls in bed every time they date another guy or girl, searching for love. I think of people who have been married 3-4 times, 5 times...what's at the bottom of getting married over and over again? It is not just that you have made some bad decisions in the past. That's not what's going on. That's how people explain 3-4-5 marriages. I have had conversations like this. Folks will say, "I admit it. I have made some really dumb choices. I was young and I thought I was in love. I was stupid."

The problem goes deeper than you making bad choices or you being stupid. The real problem is that you have turned to a counterfeit for the love you can get from God. Verse 4, "for he chose us in him before the creation of the world." Here is the love of God expressed in its purest form. God choosing you or me before we have done anything good or bad. Completely unconditioned by our performance, by our screwups, by our successes, by what we try to do for him. God, in eternity past, electing to set his precious love upon you.

O, talk about satisfaction for the soul when you meditate on God choosing you. I realize there is all kinds of debate in the history of the church about this great doctrine that is called Election – God choosing us from eternity past. I don't believe that it is simply a doctrine taught by Calvin or Luther or the Reformed tradition. I see it everywhere in the Bible. God selecting someone, God choosing someone – it's all God.

And it makes a difference, friend, in terms of your experience and knowledge of God's love that at bottom, God chose you before you ever chose him. In my own prayers I say, "Yes, God, I want you. Yes, God, I asked you to save me. Yes, God, I need you. Yes, God, I cry out to you. But do you want me? Do you love me? Do you care about me? Do you choose me before the creation of the world? Do you have a special love for me?" That's what Paul is expressing. Not that you cried out to be saved, or made some decision. But in eternity past God decided for you.

And you know this business of God choosing me and choosing you, when you finally grasp it, that from beginning to end salvation is all about God, you talk about the glory of God being expressed – that you and I are getting in not because we are such good confessors of sin, but because God is such a good forgiver. Not because we're such good disciples, but because he is such a good Savior. Not because we chose wisely, but because he chooses well and chooses securely.

Not only has God chosen us, it says, "In him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined [we will be talking about that in future weeks – God giving us a destiny and meeting our need for plan and purpose] us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will." Boy, that's a thing that will meet your



need for love. To really see yourself as an adopted son or daughter of Almighty God your Father, with Jesus Christ your brother.

When I was practicing law, what seems like now in another lifetime, I happened to do a lot of adoptions. I had the joy of finding some of the kids in this church. Let me share with you two different images of adoption. One time I did an adoption for an accountant and his wife. They had been trying to have a baby for over a decade. They couldn't conceive. I found this little baby and took the baby from the hospital and brought him over to this family. He looked down and in a totally antiseptic, completely rational way, he says, "O look, he appears to be smiling." I thought, "My gosh, this is your son. This is the baby you have been waiting for for over a decade. Jump up and down. Shout and cry. Do what the apostle Paul did. Praise God for 12 verses with a run-on sentence with praise upon praise piled up on top of each other. Do something other than 'O look, he appears to be smiling.'"

On the other occasion, I did an adoption for a pastor and his wife – thank God for pastors. They had to wait at my home for a couple of hours while I went to the hospital to get the baby. Marlene told me later that this couple didn't sit down the whole time I was gone. Two hours they are pacing back and forth looking out the window. They went outside and stood on the corner. They looked down the block to see when my car was coming. They paced some more. When I finally came and handed them the baby, they both burst into tears. They were so overjoyed. All the years of waiting – they both, husband and wife, exploded in tears of joys.

That's the picture of adoption that needs to be fixed in your heart regarding the Father's perspective regarding you. Not, "O look, he made a decision." But tears of joy. All of my yearning for you, the Father says, all of my seeking of you, all I have done in putting this great plan of the death of my Son in place for you – now you have let me meet your need. You stopped running after a counterfeit. I have my daughter home once again. I have my son home once again.

Then God meets our need for freedom. Verse 7, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. The word redemption means to be brought back out of slavery. To be set free. To be rescued.

I don't know how many of you remember the story of Captain Scott O'Grady, whose plane was downed over Bosnia back in 1995. Let me refresh your memory. Here is this young Air Force Captain, Scott O'Grady. He is flying this F16 over Bosnia on this United Nations mission. His plane was hit by a surface to air missile, fired by the Serbs. His radar picked up the surface to air missile – it is coming right at the under belly of his plane. And in just a second, Scott O'Grady pulls the handle, the ejection cord that is between his knees, and he

goes firing out of his plane just before the missile slams into it. He is 26,000 feet up in the air and parachuting down into enemy territory. The Serbs are looking for him. They see his chute coming down. Serb militiamen are just waiting for him so that they can shoot him. He hits the ground and immediately cuts loose of his chute. He covers himself with grass and dirt and lies still in the dirt and brush so that he won't be captured and killed.

For six days he plays this cat and mouse game with the Serbs. He said they got within three feet of him. They were pounding the ground with their rifle butts three feet away from his head. He said that one time a cow began grazing in the grass right between his legs. He was buried in the brush. For six days he collected rain water in a little plastic bag and drank it. He ate leaves, grass and bugs.

Finally, the Serbs clear out a little bit and he is able to send a radio signal to let the Americans know that he is still alive. They have these CIA satellites flying over Serbia with incredible photography to see if they can see pick him up on the ground. Some planes fly over head with infrared scanners to pick up his body heat.

Finally, a bunch of Marines jump in one of these super-Stallion helicopters, these massive 16 ton, 7-blade monsters. They swoop in over the area where he is supposed to be. He sees them coming in, these helicopter gun ships. He sees them flying low over the tree tops and he comes running out from his hiding place. He jumps into a Marine helicopter before any of the guys are even able to get out. They pull him on board. He is shivering, freezing cold. They put a thermal blanket around his body. As they lift off the ground, Scott O'Grady begins to weep. He utterly breaks down. He is sobbing. His chest is heaving. The only thing he could say was, "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Praise God for rescuing me." That's redemption, friends.

See, we are all stuck. We are captive in enemy territory. As one great writer put it, we are all addicts in every sense of the word. We all need to be rescued. The glory of God shows forth when you allow God to rescue you. When you let him set you free, to pull you out of enemy territory in all of the places that you have fallen captive – relationally, sexually, in terms of your consumption of food, in terms of alcohol, work, or materialism, or your speech patterns. God is most glorified when you allow him to set you free.

You give God glory when you allow him to forgive you. He wants to meet your need. He wants to set your conscious free. He sent his son to die and bleed for you on the cross. Let God forgive you. Let him take your sins from you. Let him set you free from you past. Working off your sins, keeping yourself from God, walking around with a continued guilty conscience – none of that glorifies God.

What glorifies him is when you say, “I believe that in Jesus Christ I can have redemption through Christ’s blood and the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of your grace.”

I will tell you, friends, no amount of therapy you will ever undergo, no amount of counseling, no amount of drugs, nothing could ever bring health or freedom to your life like the blood of Christ that rescues you from the guilt of your past and your sins. Nothing functions like the blood of Christ applied to your inner person.

You know, people have counterfeits and allow themselves to be satisfied with so little for their futures. How many commercials do you see for some insurance company or seller of annuities or retirement plans or brokerage houses that paint a picture of the future as being, “If you give your money to us, you can spend the last 20 years of your life in a boat fishing or on the golf course, or finally being able to open that little antique store that you have always wanted.”

Talk about a shrunken existence. Talk about a little world. Take me out and just shoot me. But don’t make me spend the last 20 years of my life in a boat with a fishing rod. I want to participate in God’s great purpose for the world.

Here it is in verse 9-10 [and we will come back to this next week] “And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.”

You need a picture of the future for your life. I need a picture of the future for my life. The picture has to be more than sitting in a boat fishing or opening up your dance studio or your antique store or moving down to Florida just puttering around on your house. God’s purpose for the world, God’s purpose for the universe, is to finally heal the universe of all of its relational breaks – breaks between people and God, breaks between people and creation, breaks between one person and another. All the different ways that the world is fractured. In the end, God is going to bring it all together and heal it all. That we are all going to be united under one head, even Jesus Christ.

And this is to God’s glory. So, as I participate today and tomorrow and in old age in the healing of the brokenness of this world; as I reconcile a relationship where I have hurt someone and I acknowledge that and confess and ask forgiveness, as I function as a peacemaker between two people, as I help to heal the relationship between a person and God...

You bring glory to God by letting him meet your need for a real purpose in life. God would present each one of you today with a choice. A choice of whether you want an ever shrinking life, a small life, in a small world, or if, instead, you are fed up with that sort of life, and you say, “You know, I want to live life in a big

and expansive way, in an abundant way by living for the great purpose of living for the glory of God.” Let’s pray.

## **Living For God's Glory**

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Rich Nathan

January 6-7, 2001

"I Believe In The Church" Series

Ephesians 1:1-10

### **I. God's Glory Makes Life Big**

A. Living Life in a Small Way

B. Living Life in a Big Way

1. Living for God's Glory (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14)

2. Living to Multiply God's Glory

"God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him."

### **II. God's Glory Meets Our Needs**

A. Our Need for Love

1. Chosen (Eph. 1:4)

2. Adopted (Eph. 1:5)

B. Our Need for Freedom

1. Redeemed (Eph. 1:7)

2. Forgiven (Eph. 1:7)

C. Our Need for Hope (Eph. 1:9, 10)