

Weekly Devotionals

## Count Your Blessings

*A Devotional Thought By Matt Bowman*

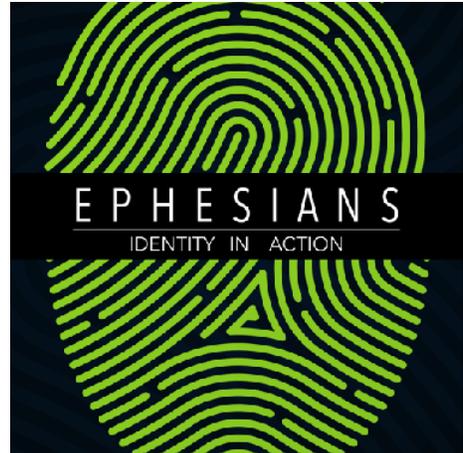
*Ephesians 1 || September 11, 2017*

*"Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ." -Ephesians 1:3 (CSB)*

The old hymn tells us to "count our many blessings, name them one by one," but one of the biggest threats to our joy is when we forget to count our blessings and instead look at everybody else's. Andy Stanley says, "When I count other people's blessings I tend to lose sight of mine." That's so true. If we're not careful we'll get caught up in what God's done for someone else that we'll overlook all the ways He has provided for us, protected us, and continues to bless us.

Paul tells us that "in Christ" we have been blessed with EVERY spiritual blessing. Let's think about that for a minute. "Every" means every, without exception. There is nothing we really need that hasn't been provided for us in Christ. We don't always feel as if we have every blessing, but isn't it true that when we look back we're always able to see God's presence and blessing, even in the midst of turmoil or hardship? Through Christ's death and resurrection, we have been redeemed from and set free from the power of sin and death. Jesus tells us in John 10:10 that in Him we have not only life, but abundant life. That sounds a whole lot like what Paul says when he tell us we have EVERY spiritual blessing in Christ.

Let's begin this week by counting our blessings in Christ. Take time this week to think about in detail and just try to name all the blessings you have and have experienced in Christ. Make a list and try to count them. I'll bet you run out of paper before you run out of blessings.



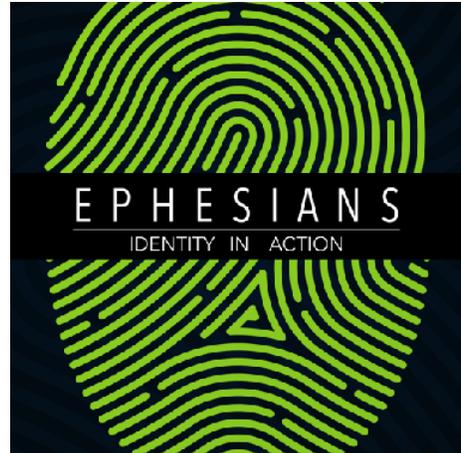
*The Cure: (How Not To Be Dead)*

*A Devotional Thought By Aaron Lambert*

*Ephesians 2 || September 18, 2017*

*"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love that He had for us, made us alive."*

*-Ephesians 2:4-5a (CSB)*



When I was growing up some of my favorite movies were the end of days, zombie apocalypse movies. In one of my favorite zombie movies, "I Am Legend", Will Smith is one of the last people in the world. He also just happens to a scientist who is desperately searching for a cure to fix the world's sickened condition. Spoiler alert! He realizes that the answer to the cure is in his blood.

This fictional story parallels an all too real condition of this world. In Ephesians 2:1-4, Paul paints the picture that in our sin WE ARE DEAD! Paul says that in our sin we are children of wrath, which sounds like a whole different horror movie. Most horror movies don't have a happy ending. However, we can be thankful that this is not the case in our situation. In verse 4, Paul writes some of the most beautiful words in Scripture, "But God". With these words everything changes. *"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love that He had for us, made us alive"*. Isn't that beautiful? We have a Father in heaven who has so much grace and mercy for us to that He halted the very existence of our nature. What Jesus did breaks all the rules. I am not a scientist but I do know that dead things tend to stay that way, but Christ had different plans for us. Because of his work on the cross, we are alive in Christ.

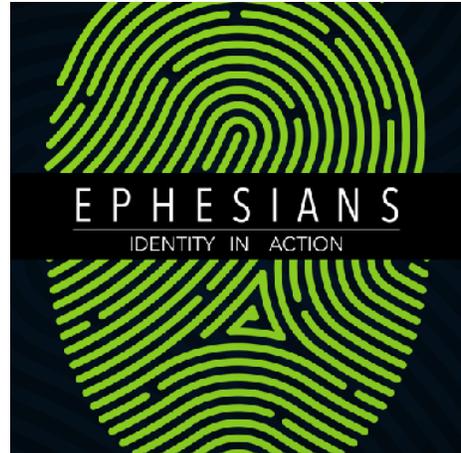
Spend some time this week reflecting on Paul's instructions in Ephesians 2:11-12 to remember what it was like before we were united with the Messiah. What do you think the benefit is to remembering who you were before Christ?

## Imagine

*A Devotional Thought By David Stephan*

*Ephesians 3 || September 25, 2017*

*"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in all the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."*                    *-Ephesians 3:20-21 (NIV)*



Wow! Who would have thought that my favorite Bible verses would be included in the devotion I was asked to write? There is so much good in the 3rd chapter, but these verses are knock-outs! You see, as a child I looked forward to the arrival of the Sears Christmas book every year. I would go through it circling gifts and turning down pages. I asked for a lot! Likewise, I have always had a wonderful imagination, and like most boys, saw myself being a Super Hero...using my Red Ryder BB gun to stop the bad guys... making that last-minute shot to win the game... running faster than a locomotive... you get the idea.

So, when I found this verse many years ago, it literally blew me away. God is able to do immeasurably more than all I could ask or imagine. He is the Super Power that is at work within us. It is His glory in all the church. It is His glory in Christ Jesus. It is His glory forever and ever. And do you know the meaning of "Amen"? That means: "so be it" or "hearty approval".

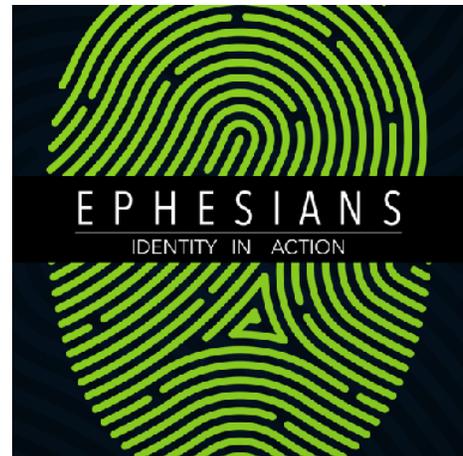
This fall do you heartily approve of these verses? Have you sometimes, like me, been guilty of wondering how in the world we could survive this or that in the church or in your life? Just remember: God is able to do immeasurably more... That's a lot!

## *Come Together*

*A Devotional Thought By Matt Bowman*

*Ephesians 4:1-16 || October 2, 2017*

*"There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope at your calling—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all." -Ephesians 4:4-6 (CSB)*



Paul's description of Christian unity here is incredibly beautiful . However, a lot of times it also feels a bit unrealistic. We know that unity is dangerously fragile. It's really easy to be hurt or to hurt someone and for that hurt to threaten the unity of the Body of Christ, which then, as we'll see, affects the ministry of the Body.

Paul reminds us of this radical unity only after he has called us to a higher way of life. He calls us to humility, gentleness, and patience with one another. Why? Because we will do things that hurt others, and others will do things that hurt us. It's reality, but how we respond to those situations determine how strong we are as a Body. Paul is telling us that since we ARE one in Christ, we should "make EVERY effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." Christ has made us one. Now we are called to do whatever we can to preserve that unity because our witness is at stake. If you'll notice what follows all of this talk about patience and unity is a lot of talk about ministry (4:7-12). After that, Paul goes back to talking about "reaching unity in the faith" and "speaking the truth in love". We pursue and preserve unity because it strengthens our witness and ministry which in turn reinforces our unity.

This week let's spend some time meditating on and praying about how each of us can "make EVERY effort" to pursue and preserve unity. Is there someone you or I need to forgive? Is there someone you or I need to apologize to? Let's make EVERY effort today and everyday to keep the unity we have "in Christ."

## Rise And Shine

*A Devotional Thought By Aaron Lambert*

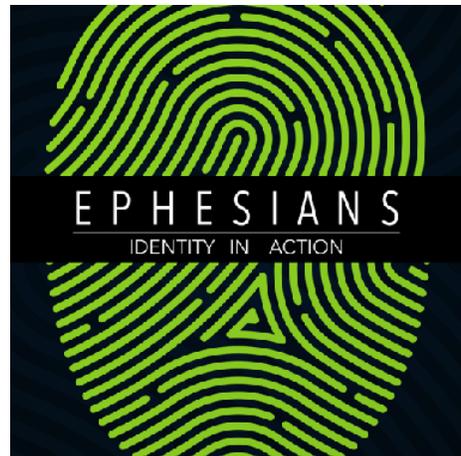
*Ephesians 4:17-5:14 || October 9, 2017*

*"Get up, sleeper, and rise up from the dead, and the Messiah will shine on you." -Ephesians 5:14 (CSB)*

If you didn't know this already I am a bit of a nerd. I enjoy everything from Star Wars to Lord of the Rings. In my college studies I have found that most of my interest has gone in the direction of the sciences. I love all of the psychological and sociological studies about how and why people do what they do. I love studying how God beautifully designed every part of our being, from our souls to our biological structures.

One fact that has blown me away recently is that about every ten years you have a completely new body. Your brain isn't even fully developed until the age of twenty five. Sorry teenagers, that means you can't possibly be smarter than your parents yet! Your cells, organs, and bone structures are constantly in a regenerative state. Our bodies are constantly being made new! In Ephesians 4:23-24, Paul says we need renewal in our minds and spirits. We are to put on a new self that is according to God's likeness. At the end of the passage, Paul uses a poem that was likely familiar to the church. It says *"Get up, sleeper, and rise up from the dead, and the Messiah will shine on you."* No, Paul is not talking about your morning coffee. Christ is calling us to live differently, to throw off our old ways and put on Christ's ways. When Jesus called us to take up our crosses, it signifies that our old life needs to be put to death in order for God's will to be fulfilled in us. Rise and shine follower of Jesus, be the light in the darkness.

Spend time this week reflecting on 4:25-32 as Paul describes what we need to "put away" and "put on." Why is it important to reflect on these things and examine our lives for fruitfulness and faithfulness?

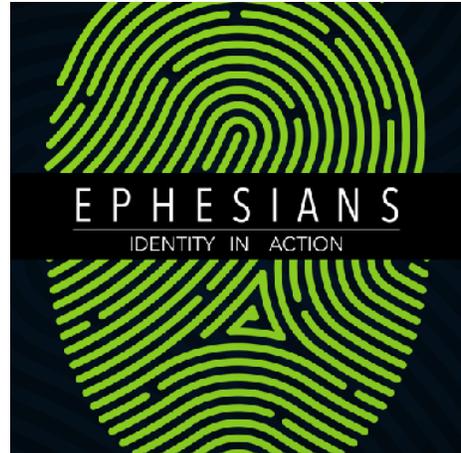


Sing!

*A Devotional Thought By David Stephan*

*Ephesians 5:15-6:9 || October 16, 2017*

*"Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil...Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything..."* -Ephesians 5:15-16, 19-20 (NIV)



Are you careful? Are you wise? Do you make the most of every opportunity? Opportunity to do what? (Didn't say in the Bible)

How about EVERY opportunity? Really???

Standing in line at the grocery store? Cutting off someone in traffic because I am late? Working in my yard and seeing my neighbor? Being punctual at work? Studying my Sunday School lesson? Prayer? Worship?

Speaking of worship, just three verses later we are told to speak (out-loud noise) to others through music as well as make music in your heart (inside your head). Why does the Bible talk so much about making music to God? It always seems to talk about the fact that music to God comes first from our heart, but then crosses our lips in outward and upward praise. Can't sing? Then speak it out loud using Bible songs, hymns and choruses. Join your voice with others. It sure seems to be important in the Bible.

Finally, we make the most of every opportunity to share praise from our hearts and mouths, by thanking God the Father for...EVERYTHING.

Everything? Yep, everything. I had better get busy. I have a lot to sing about.

## Strong Enough

*A Devotional Thought By Matt Bowman*

*Ephesians 6:10-20 || October 23, 2017*

*"Finally be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength."  
-Ephesians 6:10 (CSB)*

Have you ever felt like you didn't measure up?

Have you ever tackled a job and then realized you were in over your head?

Do you find it easy to ask for help in those situations? I usually don't.

As we finish up the letter to the Ephesian church, I think it's important to remember that Paul began his letter pointing out that our salvation and our new life is based on being "in Christ." It's the gracious work of Christ that has paved the way of salvation. That's our identity: In Christ. Now that he's wrapping up his letter and as he's explaining how to put our identity into action, Paul goes back to Christ. Our strength has to come from somewhere other than ourselves. It has to come from Christ, and the good news is that He has "vast strength."

In the verses that follow, Paul describes the battle we face. We're fighting a supernatural, spiritual battle against Satan and his demons. The bottom line is that we're not strong enough or smart enough on our own to fight and win that battle. However, when we are strengthened by the Lord's strength and when we put on His armor, we are strengthened in our own faith and in our ability to not only fight off his attacks, but also to take enemy ground as we boldly take the Gospel to the world.

Find your strength in what Christ has done and in who He's calling you and equipping you to be. Then go in His strength, His power, and His name on the mission to rescue this lost world from the power and lies of Satan.

