

## “Why Do We Exist?” Overview of Ephesians. Shane Hatfield 7/25/21

If you have a Bible, open it up to Ephesians 1. We're not going to have the scripture readings on the PowerPoint, and I'll refer to them a few times, so you'll definitely want to have your Bible open or I don't know if you guys know, they have these things called apps, applications, they're on your phone. You're supposed to laugh at that. You can download one and you'd have, Madi knows that I'm joking, she's got a smile on her face. That was one of my bad jokes, but you can open up your app and turn there, to Ephesians 1. We're actually starting a new series this week called “The Ethos Way.” This comes out of a book that we read as elders called “The Advantage” by Patrick Lencioni, he is a Christian and also an expert at organizational health. He says there are several questions, six questions that every healthy organization ought to answer. As elders we read those and we met to discuss how we would answer those questions, and so, during this sermon series we're going to take you through how we answered those questions. We hope you get a better picture of who we are, what our values are and how we're going to succeed and what that success looks like.

This week we're starting with the first question, which is “Why Do We Exist?” And our answer is: we exist because of the transforming grace of God. We exist because of the transforming grace of God. We find this through the whole Bible, but especially in the book of Ephesians, so we are going to read several parts of the book of Ephesians tonight and kind of get an overview of what Paul was trying to say in the book of Ephesians.

I want to start out by telling you an illustration of something that reminds me of grace. When I was studying for this and thinking about this idea of grace that transforms people, I thought of the classic musical ‘Les Mis.’ Many of you have probably seen ‘Les Mis’ before. ‘Les Mis’ tells the story of Jean Val Jean. Jean Val Jean was arrested and sent to prison for nineteen years for stealing a piece of bread. When he finally got out, he was on the streets, he couldn't get any work, he had no place to live, he had no place to go, but a priest found him. The priest took him in, housed him, fed him, cared for him, was kind to him. Well, that night, Jean Val Jean stole that priest's silver, went into his dining room and stole all of his silver and left. When he left, he got caught by the police and somehow the police knew he had stolen this silver from the priest, so the police brought Jean Val Jean back to the priest. There in that moment, the priest had a choice to make. Was he going to turn in Jean Val Jean and send him back to prison where he belonged, or was he going to cover for him? In that moment, the priest showed him grace. The priest grabbed the silver candlesticks and said, ‘You forgot these too.’ He gave the candlesticks to Jean Val Jean. The police let him go, and Jean Val Jean got to go free, even though he was guilty. That one act of grace transformed his life. He went on to become the mayor of the city. He went on to use his wealth to develop a business that would help others. Later, when one of his managers unjustly fired a woman, the woman was thrown into poverty, she was given into a life of prostitution, Jean Val Jean found out about it and he went and rescued her and took in her orphan daughter and vowed to care for her for the rest of her life. That one act of grace totally transformed his life.

When we look at this passage tonight, what I want us to see is that just how that priest's act of grace transformed Jean Val Jean's life, it is God's act of grace that transforms our lives. God's grace is at work transforming us and transforming everything around us. It transforms our hearts, our minds, our souls, our relationships. It transforms the way we work, the way we play, and the way we worship. God's grace transforms everything that it touches, and it is the reason

why we exist. So, what is grace? It's something Christians talk about a lot. Grace happens when we receive good things that we don't deserve. Just in general. In everyday life, grace happens when we receive good things that we don't deserve. Grace happens in everyday situations like, I don't know, maybe you're angry and upset with your spouse, and they cook dinner for you anyway. Not that that ever happens around our house, but maybe it happens around yours. Grace happens when your parents help you spend time with your friends, even when you've been disrespectful. Grace happens whenever your neighbor picks up your trash for you, even if you haven't met them or said hello to them before. Grace happens when we receive good things that we don't deserve.

The Bible generally talks about two different types of grace. There's common grace. Common grace is the grace that God shows everybody in creation, every person and everything in creation. He has created them, He sustains them, He preserves them, He gives them everything that they need for life. God's covenant with Noah in the Old Testament is a good example of God's common grace. He promised that He would never flood the earth again and that He would always maintain creation. Jesus talks about God's common grace when He says that God makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust. All of creation exists because of God's common grace.

The second kind of grace that the Bible talks about is God's saving grace. God's saving grace is His free, undeserved mercy that He shows to sinners. It's the good gifts that He gives sinful men and women that don't deserve it. God reconciles sinners to Himself. He reconciles them to each other, and He equips them to serve in His kingdom. His saving grace is the grace that brings peace in our lives and peace on earth, and the church exists because of God's saving grace. That's what we're going to focus on tonight. We're going to look at two broad categories in the book of Ephesians. First, we're going to see that we exist because of God's grace before creation, and then secondly, we exist because of God's grace in our recreation. We exist because of God's grace before creation, and in our recreation. So, first let's look at God's grace before creation. If you've got your Bibles, open up to Ephesians 1. We're going to read verses 3-6. It says:

“<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup> even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.”

So, before creation existed, from all eternity, God existed as one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God was free, God was independent, and God was complete. God lacked nothing. It's important that you get that.

So, God lacked nothing. God did not create human beings because He had some great cosmic need for power or glory or whatever, and He created us to fill it. God was whole and complete in Himself. Father, Son, and Spirit loved and served one another from all eternity, and the Father loved the Son so much that He wanted to give the Son a gift. He wanted to show how much He loved His Son, and that gift that He wanted to give His Son was the church. It was a people. God would make this church holy and blameless. He would bless them with every spiritual blessing through Christ. They would be God's children, and the church would be the bride of Christ. That church would rebel and reject Him, and they would need to be redeemed

and rescued, we'll talk about that later. But it's important for you to know that even before the foundation of the world, God put Christ and the church together in His mind. Everything that happens throughout the history of the world, and the history of the church, has been to that end, to bring Christ and the church together. All of the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, have all been working together toward that moment. Right? This passage we just read talks about how God the Father had a plan, and His plan was to bring the church and Christ together. If we were to read on, we would go to the next paragraph and it talks about how the Son was involved and how the Son sacrificed His life to redeem these people for God. Later on, it talks about how the Spirit fills these people and bestows all of these spiritual blessings on this people. All of this is initiated by God. All of the main subjects of almost every sentence in this passage is God. It is God who blesses, God who chooses, God who destines, God who bestows, God who lavishes. It is God initiating these things. The church exists because of God's grace before creation that He wanted to lavish His grace and kindness on it, through Jesus.

That is why we exist. Ethos is an expression, a local expression of the body of Christ. We are the bride of Christ. We are the family of God. We began formally in 2013, Beau Berman was the church planter and the pastor, and Beau had a great vision for a church that boldly proclaimed the gospel and passionately worshipped Jesus, and that did so in midtown Tulsa. He wanted to reach the young people of midtown Tulsa, especially those who were unchurched or de-churched, and he had a great passion for those things, and did a fantastic job of ministering to those people, and Ethos, by God's grace over the last eight years has done that and has done much, much more. But our history didn't start with Beau, and it didn't start with the PCA, though that's our denomination, and it didn't start with Acts 29, that's our church planting network. It didn't start with any of that. It started in the mind of God, where God put Christ and the church together. We were to be the love gift from the Father to the Son. We exist wholly and completely because of God's grace, and if that's true, then that gives us a security that surpasses anything that could come from us. Anything that could come from me, or from you, or from a denomination or a church planting network, or anything else. The gates of hell will never prevail against the church. Ethos may close their doors tomorrow, I hope they don't, because it would be hard to pay my mortgage and take care of my kids, but it could close its doors tomorrow, but the church will always exist. The body of Christ will always exist as the love gift from the Father to the Son. So, the first thing we see in Ephesians is that we exist because of God's grace before creation.

The second thing we see is that we exist because of God's grace in our recreation. As I alluded to, you know, if you've read the Bible, if you've been around church, probably, things didn't go as planned. God created these people in the garden to love Him, to know Him, to be with Him, and then they rejected His love and grace, and sin entered the world, so God had to redeem them. Ephesians 2 explains how God redeems individual souls and transforms their lives. So, look at Ephesians 2, we're going to look at verses 1-10. We'll start out with 1-3, and then we'll talk about it and break it up from the next part.

“<sup>1</sup>And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup>in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup>among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”

Those first three verses describe the sobering reality of the sinfulness of men and women apart from Christ. Apart from Christ, and God's intervention, we're not just bad people, we're not just flawed people or bent people or ignorant people. This passage says that we were spiritually dead. We were totally opposed to the Spirit of God. We lived in active rebellion against Him. We followed the spiritual forces of evil that exist in this world and we focused on satisfying only our own desires. And because of that, because we totally rejected God's creation and God's design as our creator and redeemer, we were under His wrath. We were subject to His justice. That's the bad news. But there's good news.

Look at verse 4, what does it say? It says: "But God." It doesn't say, 'but you,' it doesn't say, 'but Shane,' it doesn't say, 'but your mind,' or 'your will,' or 'your emotions.' It says, "But God." So, this is what God did:

"<sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

God changed us. Why? Because of His great love and mercy, because of His love. He loved us because He loved us. He loved us the way a parent loves a child as soon as their born. That baby comes out of the womb and all it does is need. All it does is cry and sleep and poop and pee. And you think, 'That is the most beautiful, wonderful baby in all of the world! I love that! I'm going to sacrifice everything for it!' And it can't even see you! Research tells us that babies basically have zero vision after twelve inches. They look at you the way they look at a chair or a light fixture! But you love them because they're yours! That's how God loved us. Even when we were dead in our trespasses and sins, even when we were rebellious, even when we rejected Him, He loved us, and He worked a total transformation in us. He made us alive. He removed our transgressions. He raised us up with Christ and seated us in heaven. It was His free and unmerited grace that saved us and nothing else. It was a gift. We didn't do anything to deserve it. We didn't do anything to earn it. If you are in Christ, it is not because of your intelligence or because of your discipline or because of your good deeds, it is solely because of God's grace in kindness toward you in Christ Jesus. All who humbly throw themselves before the Lord and receive that, receive His grace.

We exist because of His transforming grace. And because we live because of His transforming grace, there's nothing we can boast about. As we talked as elders, one of the things that we want for Ethos is for it to be a humble congregation. It is not proud or boastful. This theology here that says everything we have is a gift from God, that our spiritual lives are a gift, should humble us. It should knock us to our knees in wonder, love and praise for God, and it should cause us to be a servant to all those around us.

When I was in Stillwater, I used to work out in a class. I went to group workout classes. And the workouts were always hard, and I loved it, because at the end of every workout, you looked across the gym and everybody was on their backs, from the weakest person all the way up to the strongest person, everybody was floored. I always thought, 'What an amazing picture of

the gospel. The gospel floors everybody.' There's not a single person in this room who can stand before God aside from His grace and mercy to us in Jesus.

It's that grace and mercy that transforms us, right? If we exist because of God's transforming grace, then He radically changes us. He works something different in us, right? God didn't just take bad people and make them good. God takes spiritually dead people and brings them to life. God takes slaves and He frees them. God takes condemned people, and He forgives them. A friend of mine who is a campus minister really drove this point home. He was telling me once about a friend of his who was a graduate student, and they would work out together every week. They would go work out, they would go play basketball together, they were friends, but his friend was not a Christian. He said occasionally as they were working out or playing basketball, or whatever, they would start to talk and the conversation would venture into spiritual things, and he said he would tell his friend on a regular basis, 'I am praying that God would resurrect you from the dead.' I thought, 'Matt, that's a pretty startling thing for you to say to somebody,' and I kind of expected him to laugh and like joke about it, and he didn't. He was dead panned. He said, 'Yeah, I am praying for God to resurrect him from the dead.' He's right. That's what God does when He converts a Christian, is He resurrects them from spiritual death. That's what we're doing as we proclaim the gospel of grace and we minister the gospel of grace to a lost and dying world. We're asking God to raise people from the dead spiritually, to give them spiritual life, and the grace of that just can't be undone, and it can't be outdone. It is magnificent. It is mind blowing.

I was talking to my friend once who was, I would say he was seeking. He was going to church. He was trying to understand the gospel. We were processing it together, and I said, 'You know, God loved you so much that He sent His only Son to die for you.' He said, 'Well you know what, that doesn't really do a lot for me.' I said, 'Why not?' And he said, 'Well, because I have a son, I love my son, I would do anything for my son. I would die for my son I love him so much. So, it's not really that much that God would die for me?' I said, 'Here's the problem, here's what you forget: God didn't send His only Son to die for you when you were His son... He sent His Son to die for you when you were a slave to sin. When you were in rebellion against Him, when you hated Him. That's when He sent His Son to die for you.' That's what God did for us. Romans 5:8 says, "but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Christ didn't die for you at your best, He died for you at your worst. That's the gospel of grace. That's the gospel that transforms us and changes us, and that's the gospel that transforms us as individuals, and it's the gospel that transforms us as a group.

What Paul says in Ephesians is that God is not just saving individuals, He is saving an entirely new society. He is creating an entirely new group of people. Right after this in Ephesians 2:13-22, he describes this new society. Paul says that God brought peace, not only between God and man, but between Jew and Gentile, between two groups of people who were mortal enemies. He said there was a dividing wall of hostility between them and through the blood of Jesus Christ He tore down that dividing wall. He tore down everything that separated Jew and Gentile, to create one new man in the place of two, and it is the Spirit of God who brings those people near to God and brings those people near to each other, and it's through the Spirit of God that those people are being built up into the house of God with Christ as the cornerstone and the apostles and the prophets as the foundation. This new society is the new dwelling place of God that has enemies worshipping together and serving together and loving each other. D.A. Carson, who is a pastor and theologian, said that 'Christians are a natural band of enemies that God has joined together to love one another and to love Him.' It's a natural band of enemies that God has

brought together to love one another and to love Him. If that's true, if that's the group of people that God is bringing together, then we must pursue peace in our church no matter what. No matter what our political party is, no matter what our cultural view are, no matter what our socio-economic status is, no matter what our ethnic background is, what our religious background is, we have been united together in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, and God has brought us together in peace to love one another and Paul says, 'Keep the bond of peace and the unity of the Spirit.'

I read an article recently called, 'The six-way fracturing of evangelicalism.' Basically, the writer discussed how the recent religious cultural turmoil that of our country has sort of gone through has splintered the church. He said, used to, in general you had people of different classes and beliefs and political parties all worshipping together in the same congregation, they were all focused on Christ together. But what he says, what's happened recently is it has split the church to where now people who are genuine believers and who love each other in Christ refuse to worship together. Ethos has always strived to have a diverse congregation, to have a congregation that has unity in the essentials, liberty in the nonessentials, and charity in everything, and that's how we want to continue. If God created us to be at peace together, to be one with each other, then let's strive to do everything we can to maintain that bond of peace, because His grace has brought us together, and it's this grace that transforms us and renews us and Ephesians 5 tells us that it's not just a new society, that it's a bride, and that bride is going to be spotless. Jesus wants to cleanse it and wash it through the Holy Spirit. He wants to make it spotless and wrinkle free and holy and blameless. He loves and cherishes the church, and He nourishes it. He wants us to love and cherish it and nourish it as well. He wants us to experience His grace in it and express His grace to everyone who comes through that door, and He wants us to be a part of this transformation process that takes place in each other. We don't want to just have peace, we want to have purity, we want to help each other grow in Christ. We can have those two things together. We can have purity and we can have peace together. The gospel calls us to it, so we need to strive for it together.

God is transforming us as people, He's transforming us as a group, and He's transforming all of creation. That's the last thing we see in Ephesians. If you go back to Ephesians 1:9-10, Paul hints at this transformation. He says: "making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." The goal of God's grace is to give a love gift to the Son. But it's not just about redeeming all of creation. God wants to redeem everything; He wants to transform everything. His grace *does* transform everything. He will not stop at anything less than the renewal of the entire cosmos. Talk about a grand vision! He wants everything to be united in Christ. God's plan is that all things that were created through Christ and for Christ which Christ holds together, would be finally united in Christ and subject to His rule. God's two creations, the church and the universe, unified with Jesus, filled with the Spirit, absent of Satan, sin and death and everything that causes discord. Until that day comes, God wants us to participate in His great work of kingdom redemption and Paul tells us that God gives the officers of the church, and He gives spiritual gifts to the church to equip us for the work of ministry, and so, as we experience God's grace we get to go out and be a part of the way God is transforming culture in everything that we do.

The Ephesian church is a great example of that. Paul in his missionary journeys went and shared the gospel at Ephesus and many people were converted there. They established a church. Well, Ephesus was the home of Diana, or the god of Artemis. It had become the headquarters for

cult worship, for this Greek god. Well, when the gospel came in it radically transformed the people there. In Acts we read that they were no longer buying silver to make false gods for the temples, and it threw off the entire economy of the city. That's what the gospel does to us. It transforms us so that when we go out of here, we throw off the entire economy of the city and communities, for the good of it, because we're not participating in the idolatry of the culture. We are an alternative society within society, that's being transformed and renewed by God's grace. We get to be a part of God transforming culture.

We exist because of God's transforming grace. It's His grace that saves us. It's His grace that sustains us. It's His grace that changes us, and if that's the reason we exist, then we can never harden our hearts toward it. We need it each and every day, and every person that comes through those doors needs God's grace. In Les Mis, Jean Val Jean has an enemy. His name is Javert. Javert is the police officer who arrests him, and Javert makes it his mission to arrest Jean Val Jean. Javert lives by the law. He lives by duty. He does what is right and he is going to catch this criminal, so he tries to hunt down Jean Val Jean, he tries to catch him and kill him. Well, through the course of the movie you get to a scene toward the end where Jean Val Jean, the man who has been changed by grace, has a gun. He's got it right at Javert's back. He's got an opportunity to kill this man, to get rid of the man who is hunting him down, and trying to kill him, but he doesn't do it. He lets Javert go free. He shows Javert grace, the same way that he was shown grace. Well, guess what it does to Javert? He can't stand it. He hates it. He hardens his heart. Jean Val Jean's grace undoes him, and Javert eventually throws himself off a bridge.

Don't harden your heart toward God's grace. Receive it. We need it every week. We need it every time we come through those doors. We need it every time we gather together. We need God's grace! If you're here tonight and you've been rejecting it, you've been rebelling against it, you've been hardening your heart, today is the day of salvation. Today is the day to receive it. Today is the day to fall on your face and say, "Lord, I need you. I have been rebellious. I have rejected you. I have refused your grace. I have gone my own way. Please forgive me in Christ. I throw myself at your feet. Change me. Transform me. Make me a part of this new society. I want to be your child." Don't harden your heart to His grace. It's there for you. Receive it. Let's pray together.