

Develop Your Full Potential in Christ: The Great Scope of Grace

By Paris Reidhead*

We've been looking at Ephesians as a manual on developing your full potential in Christ. We believe that it is His intention not that we should merely be saved somehow, but triumphantly. Not that we should just make it through, but that we should have that which we can lay at the feet of the Lord Jesus to have a crown of rejoicing that we can cast at His feet. And therefore, the Epistle to the Ephesians, in my judgement at least, is that handbook how to develop your full potential in Christ.

We saw yesterday as we considered the first segment verses 1-17 that the Ephesian believers were partakers of His grace. How marvelous is that grace! How wonderful it is to realize that as Father, God purposed our salvation before the foundation of the world. You see that in verses four and five: "He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy, without blame before Him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself according to the good pleasure of His will" (Eph. 1:4-5). So God has purposed, even before He made the world, our salvation. And in that purpose He has anticipated everything we're going to need. Everything that is necessary for us to be everything that He has planned. Holy and without blame before Him in love implies that there is going to be victory. There is going to be strength and wisdom and guidance and absolutely everything that He anticipated that we would need is in His purpose.

Then in the next section, verses 7 and 8 have to do with that which the Son, God the Son provided. Now He only provided that which the Father purposed, but everything that the Father purposed. "In whom we have redemption through His blood," that is the Lord Jesus Christ; "the forgiveness of sin, according to the richness of His grace wherein He hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He has purposed in Himself" (Eph. 1:7-9). Here again the Lord Jesus Christ provided that redemption. And everything that we need to be everything He's planned is included in that redemptive provision.

But we are now dealing with two factors, you see. The first "that which before the foundation of the world the Father purposed, and then that which in the fullness of time the Son provided." But we're not left to our own devices. Notice, "that in the dispensation of the fulness of time He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in Heaven, and which are on Earth; *even* in Him: in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will: that we should be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also, *trusted* after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:10-14). Now, the Father purposed our salvation; the Son provided it, and the Holy Spirit, God in His omnipresence, wants to make real to us and in us, experientially real, all that the Father purposed and all that the Son provided.

One of the most serious indictments that you find in the epistle to the Hebrews is the fact that they would tread under their feet that which the Father had purposed. They counted it as having no worth and no value and not important to them. What a tragedy it is that people do get the idea somehow that the whole of God's intention was to save us from hell. Thou shall call His name Jesus for He shall save His people from hell and take them to heaven when they die. Is that what it says? I must be reading from the "reversed vision." That often gets in the way, I find, not only with me, but with others.

No, that isn't what he says. He said, "Thou shall call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins" (Mat. 1:21). God's purpose is to make us like His Son. The Lord Jesus, therefore, was willing to become what we were, so that we could be made what He is. And if we understand that, then we understand how serious is the indictment to the Hebrews that they would tread under their feet as having no worth or meaning or value that which the Lord Jesus Christ had purchased with His blood. They counted it as having no significance. And we would not be among that number. Certainly if we are wise we don't

want to be so included. Rather that we should treasure for ourselves everything that the Father purposed and the Son provided.

Then we saw in the 15th verse and thereafter that the apostle having established for the believer brethren at Ephesus something of the nature of His grace then proceeds to tell them how they are to avail themselves of this ministry of the Spirit. He declared that he prayed for them. Isn't interesting that the believers at Ephesus got onto Paul's prayer list. Just about the time people would get off of ours. We say, "Isn't great God saved Mary! Now, let's pray for Bill." Well, that's not the way the apostle did it. He said we are so pleased to hear that God has saved you. Now we put you on our prayer list. That just isn't the way we thought about it, was it? But it is the way the Lord Jesus does it. He says, "I'm not praying for the world, I praying for them which thou hast given me;" out of the world (Joh. 17:9). And the apostle said, "I heard of your faith in Jesus," so now I'll put you on my prayer list. And I'm praying for you (Eph. 1:15). What is he praying for? That the God of our Lord Jesus, the Father of glory "will give unto them the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ. That the eyes of their understanding may be opened that they may know" (Eph. 1:17-18).

Now in a sense we begin with our continued study at this point in the 18th verse. That we know there are three things that He cites here that He wants us to know. They must be very inclusive. They must have dimensions far beyond the mere sequence of words. There must be something he implies and we can infer that corresponds to what the Father purposed; what the Son provided; and now that the Spirit of God is going to illumine to our hearts as well we trust as He did to the hearts of the church at Ephesus.

So notice then in Ephesians one beginning with verse 18. "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe" (Eph. 1:18-19a). Three things, and these three things will, I believe, give to us some idea of the scope of God's grace.

"That we might know what is the hope..." That word hope really is expectation. Hope has been defined by one of the dictionaries as being, "an expectation, a valid expectation, based upon legitimate grounds." Is it going to be sunny today? Well, I hope so. I don't really know anything about it, but I hope so. Are you going to get a promotion this year? Well, I hope so. I don't know anything about it, but we hope so. That's not the manner in which the word is used in the New Testament, not here. Not something that has the prospect of not happening because it's just wishful thinking. This is a valid expectation based on reasonable grounds. God had considerable foundation for His hope, that hope that we have. Now, notice again it's not only a reasonable valid expectation, based upon reasonable grounds, but it is "the hope of His calling."

In most of the commentaries I have on this portion of Ephesians, I find that following a tendency that is very common to my heart and I'm sure to that of the commentators that it sounds something like this. 'That we might know what is the hope that we have been called to.' Obviously, the Scripture has a great deal to say about that, and we're very interested in that. But just because that's the natural tendency it doesn't seem quite right that we should twist the text, the original text to make it fit our convenience. I think the text really says precisely what the King James, from which I'm reading, says. What is it? "The hope of His calling." Did the Lord Jesus Christ have a call? Of course He did. Where did it begin? Well, it began before the foundation of the world, didn't it. It began back there when God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This God who is love yearned for, with an eternal yearning, yearned for someone upon whom He, God in His triunity, could pour His love. You see, in a sense love is incomplete without an object, without someone who needs it, that understands it, that can enjoy it, and can return it in such a way as to satisfy the heart of the one who has originally given the love.

The only being that the Bible says that God loves is man. He made other beings. We don't know a great deal about them. He made Lucifer. The Scripture doesn't say God ever loved Lucifer. He made cherubim and seraphim. I've accumulated a world of ignorance about both. I really don't know much about cherubim and seraphim, but I know one thing the Bible doesn't say that God loved them. And it does not say, either, in what sense cherubim and seraphim differ from man.

The only being that God has said that He made in His image, and in His likeness, is man. And the only being that God has said He loves is man. And in a sense, perhaps the reason is that because we can only love that which is like us.

You know we're accustomed to using the word 'love' rather loosely, aren't we. You've heard people say we love our new house or I love that shade of blue or well, I just love this new car, or where I come from, I love Southern fried chicken. You know chicken and cars and houses and colors can't understand and appreciate what is being poured on them. They don't need it to be complete. They can't return it. So as manner of speaking we have abused the word 'love' when we so use and I would like to rescue the little word, shake it out of all this abuse, and pick it up and leave it so that it is used only when it is appropriately used. That's in two directions, to love people who are like you and love God in whose image you are made. That's the only time and place to use the word 'love'.

All these other things like, enjoy, appreciate some other word please. Let's keep this word 'love' so that it has some meaning when we really need it. Not wear it out in the useless and the trivial, so when we come to actually express something we have a trite and meaningless symbol.

Now, God had in His heart a great yearning and longing. God as Father wanted children. God as Son, as Bridegroom yearned for a bride. Someone with whom He could share all that He is and all that He has and all that He's doing and wants to do. They say that one reason men work hard, one of the primary drives of American and European energies and activities is so that they can please the woman in their life. The wife or whoever it might be. This is one of the primary driving forces in human experience. Men work so that they can have that which will please and satisfy that woman in their life for whom they're working.

We understand something of this. We understand that God made the world as beautifully as He did, so that He might have something that would please His beloved. As Father He wanted to have that which would please His children. As Bridegroom He wanted to have that which would please His bride. And so He made the world and all that is in it, in that way and for that purpose.

Now, this ancient longing, this ancient call included the fact that this one made in His image, made in His likeness had to be given certain qualities if he was to be the object of His love. I remember years ago at the University of Minnesota a student said, "Why did God ever make man in the first place if He knew that man was going to do all the cruel things that he's doing?" This was back in the Second World War, and word had come of some of the atrocities that had grown out of that time of carnage. He said, "Why did God ever make man so that he could sin?" Well, that's not an immature childish question that should be passed off with a flip of the tongue or the finger or the toss of the head. It's an important question. And it's one that's involved here in His calling.

After all, what is sin? I think that we've got two definitions that fit close together, and we should see them briefly in this context. First, what's temptation? To find out what's temptation you got to find out how God made man. When He made us, He said of the man that He had made, "it is good" (Gen. 1:31). We go back and look at that creature that He had made in His image, He said was good, and we find that He gave to that being, to man, certain drives or urges or propensities or appetites, you call them what you will. They're there. For instance, He knew that we would be nourished by the repeated intake of food so He wired us in such a way that our computer tells us now and then that we're hungry. We call that computer report, an appetite. We call it hunger, and God put it into us. So that when there's a need for food our system rings a lot of bells, and lights go on, so to speak, and says you'd better get some, because we're running out down here. This urge or drive for hunger is the way God put us together. It's the way He wired us up.

He knew that we learn in sequence. We're microcosms of God. In His image, but on a miniature scale. God is infinite, and we're finite. God knows everything, simultaneously. He never learns anything new. We don't know simultaneously. We only learn sequentially or in sequence. We learn, for instance, one day in school that two plus two makes four. We think we've mastered arithmetic. We go back the next day, and she tells us two and three makes five, and she's thrown us all out of gear and spoiled our whole relationship to arithmetic. Because that's how we learn. One thing one day, and another thing the next day. Until we go on and on and on until we either quit or just decide we've learned all we want to learn. But whatever we know today we acquired item by item and fact by fact.

Now, there's a hunger that's in us that God put there. It's that hunger that is expressed usually one of the first words your child learns. Why, Mommy? What's this? Why, Mommy? Why? That's God's little bell ringing in there in the computer says there's so much to know and you've got to learn all you can as fast as you can. Mother prays, oh Heavenly Father, I don't want my child to be dumb and not able to speak. But six months later she's saying, Lord couldn't You slow him down a little? It's 'why' all the time. It's getting to be much. I don't want him to be retarded, but just retard a few 'whys?' No, it's not going to work that way. God wired that little tyke to learn and put into him a drive for knowledge.

A drive for sex. God make Adam and Eve, and out from that pair would come this beloved, these children that would satisfy His Father's heart; this bride that would satisfy the Bridegroom's heart. He gave to us a drive or an urge for sex.

Then God had made such a wonderful world that He gave us an urge or drive or hunger for beauty and for pleasure. He wanted us to enjoy what He had made. Then He intended us to serve as the lords of and rulers of His creation. So He gave to us this drive to govern and to take charge and to control. Because He was a protecting caring Father He gave us an appetite for security.

So with a drive for knowledge and for hunger and for food and for sex and for security and for pleasure and for authority. He looked at the man into whom He had put all of these and He said, "It is good." Don't talk about the appetites being bad. You malign the Creator when you do that.

What happened? What was the difficulty? Into the garden came the serpent, and what did he do? He tempted Eve. Now, what's temptation? I've said all of that to say this. What's temptation? Let me give you a definition. Temptation is the proposition, presented to your intellect, to satisfy a good appetite in a bad way. Now, there wasn't anything wrong with the appetite for food or pleasure or for even status or authority God had given her these. What was the whole proposition? Lucifer was proposing to her that she satisfy these good appetites in a way that God had forbidden. That's temptation.

Now, what's sin? Sin is the decision of the will to satisfy a good appetite in a bad way. If God had made man so that he couldn't sin, then He would have had to make man without an imagination because it's at that level that we're tempted, mentally visualizing satisfying a good appetites in a bad way. Secondly, He would have had to have made man without the ability to decide to satisfy a good appetite in a bad way. Thus man would have been a mere automaton, a machine. Can you imagine a father away, as I was for years as an evangelist and in Bible teaching ministry, coming back to my little family and seeing my children, now their pretty much grown up as nearly appropriate as it once was, but can you imagine my having to hypnotize my children until my mind controlled theirs and then to give them orders to come over and stand in front of me, put your arms around my neck, place your lips upon my cheek, say I love you, Daddy? Can you see the little automatons march over like robots and go through that motion? Can you imagine that such a performance for a moment would satisfy the need in a lonely daddy's heart?

Nor would have it been worthwhile for God to have waited from eternity past to have man turn out to be an automaton, a machine that marched over and said God I love you? No, He had to make man capable of saying I hate you, I won't, so that when he said I love you, I will, that love, that obedience had meaning to the heart of God.

Now, anticipating man's action, the Lord Jesus Christ became "the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). He wanted the beloved so much, He yearned with such an ancient yearning and longing. So deep was the desire of the Father for children, of the Bridegroom for a bride that He was prepared to make man as He had to make him if he was to be child and bride to God, even so that he could sin. And the Lord Jesus, as it were, said Father, I am prepared to have that bride, and for Thou canst have the children, to die, to become what they are so that they can truly be remade in Our image and in Our likeness. So before He ever made man the Lord Jesus Christ became "the Lamb slain before the world was founded."

Now, there was an expectation that He had. In the fullness of time the Lord Jesus, the One who ruled the universe, the One by whose outstretched hand and scepter the world had been created by whose spoken word stars had leaped into existence found their place and stayed in their course, this One, God the eternal Son, in the fullness of time took off the diadem of His glory, and He put it down. He took off the robes of His majesty, and He folded them up and the scepter of His power, and He

laid it by. The next moment He answered the call, the eternal call in the heart of the triune God for a beloved. What was it? It was an answer to a call that had been there from before the world was made and He was off on that journey, that journey into time.

One cell in the body of Mary was quickened by the Holy Spirit who over shadowed her. God in His omnipresence compressed the eternal Son by whom the world was made to join one cell, invisible save by a microscope so that that life which was conceived in Mary and born of Mary was none other than "Emmanuel, God come in the flesh" (Mat. 1:23). Who had taken upon Himself our form and likeness. He had made us in His image, and now He was made in our image, with a body like unto our body, with all the limitations of it, with all the appetites and urges and drives of it as He made it when He said it was good. That babe that was born of Mary was truly God come in the flesh. The Council of *Nicaea* said, "He was very God of very God for there were those who doubted His deity. He was very man of very man for there were those who doubted His humanity." "He grew increased wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man" in response to His call, the call of His heart (Luk. 2:52). In His ministry He declared I have no fear that my coming is in vain. The Father has told Me that if I will declare what He has given Me to declare that all that the Father's given Me shall come unto Me. This wasn't a speculation. This wasn't just a fantasy trip. When the Lord Jesus came He knew that there would be those who would receive His Word and would believe on Him. There can be no hope in this regard, because He has been told by the Father that all that the Father has given Him shall come unto Him.

But, there is another element that's involved in this text, the hope of His calling, the reasonable expectation based upon valid grounds. What is that? Well, if it is to be established as a fact that there would be those that would come, who would repent of their sin, and who would trust in His name and would be born into His family through faith in His finished work, and faith in Him, then it must be that this hope of His calling has to do with the kind of people that are being written to in this epistle.

What kind of people are they? The saints at Ephesus, faithful in Christ Jesus, of whose faith the apostle could say he gave thanks for he saw it certified with the hallmark of genuineness that couldn't be counterfeited, love unto all the saints. So the hope of His calling must have to do with believers. It must be, therefore, something that a believer, someone that is in Christ can do or can refuse to do. It must be something that this believer in Christ must be informed about, must understand and then have the option to choose to do. Or if he is not informed, obviously, he can't and when he is informed he may refuse. So when it says, "the eyes of their understanding may be opened that we may know what is the hope of His calling." I would believe that it would relate perhaps to something like Romans 12, verses 1 and 2. You recall it don't you? "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God," said the apostle. But behind the apostle I see another standing speaking through him, the Lord Jesus Christ. And He is holding out nail scarred hands and pointing to His sword driven side. And I can hear Him as He says entreating you and me His beloved redeemed by His blood. I can hear Him as He says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by these mercies," My love for you, My death for you that you who have the full right to do it and the power not to do it, "I beseech you brethren, ...that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

Now I believe that the hope of His calling is the expectation that Christ had that if you and I were to discover that we could not save ourselves by our own efforts, we could not accomplish the living of a life utterly unnatural to us in a world in which we had once been such rebels against God by our own natural effort. That if we had come to the conclusion that we had to be saved by grace, and redeemed by another death for us that we would not quickly after that make the groundless mistake of thinking, because we were pardon from past sins somehow now we were fixed up inside in such a way that we could go on in our own energy and strength which wasn't enough to atone for one sin. And that somehow we could proceed to live the Christian life to the glory of God and the satisfaction of Christ in our own energy, in our own effort, in our own intelligent, in our own strength. Now I just believe the hope of His calling was this, that if you had discovered that you couldn't save yourself by your own efforts would not have great difficulty discovering that you couldn't live the Christian by your own efforts. If you couldn't redeem yourself from one sin, much less a mountain of your sins by a life time of effort, then how could you ever make the mistake of thinking that you had somehow by pardon acquired the ability to live the Christian life to the glory of God and to the satisfaction of His lovely Son? If you couldn't save yourself no more could you live the Christian life.

Reginal Wallace of England on one occasion said, "The happiest day of my Christian life was the day I discovered that I couldn't live it." Well, have you discovered that? Have you? Well, I have news for you, if you haven't discovered it, your family have. They know it. And your neighbors know it. And the people you work with know it. And I just a sneaking suspicion you know it too. You can't live the Christian life, because it is utter unnatural to you. It's His life and you can't live His life.

You know Sheldon wrote a book In His Steps and I read it and I was enamored with it, thrill with it. It just seemed to be such an exciting concept to walk in His steps. I tried it, like a little two year old. You know striding along in the deep snow after his daddy with the 3 foot stride. He is pretty soon floundering and I was floundering. And I found absolute no consolation or help in that. Because you see Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh and I am just a sinner saved by grace. And I haven't any ability to walk in His steps. The only thing that does is bring me to the place I cry out, "Oh God, I can't." Sometimes that is a long time God getting us there. Because we have a seemingly insatiable determining to prove that we can. We can't. You can't live His life.

What is it the hope of His calling? It is the expectation that you have He had that if He had died for you and provided Himself for you that you were going to...that it was indispensable. That Christ should not only save you from the penalty of what you have done, but that He should live His life in you. His life in you and you would count it "your reasonable service" to say, "Lord Jesus, I can't. I can't. But You can. You can do it. You can live Your life in me." Oh I believe the hope of His calling was that everyone redeemed by His blood would recognize that His purpose wasn't just to save us from Hell, but to save us from ourselves. And save us from the futility of going on in a poor, stumbling, bumbling, failing effort to try to do something that He never intended for us to do and that we early should have found out we couldn't do. And to bring us to the place where we would be prepared to say, "Lord Jesus I can't, but You can."

You see friends, when the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world His destination wasn't Bethlehem, where He was born. That wasn't the reason for His coming. The place to which He intended to come. Oh, it was one of the stops on the way. When He came into the world, His destination wasn't a refugees home in Egypt, where He lived for those eight years or more, maybe twelve. That wasn't where He intended to be. That wasn't His destination. When the Lord Jesus left His Father's presences and came into the world, His destination wasn't a carpenter's home in Nazareth. And those of us that have been there, climb down into that Nabatean cave over which the house was built, probably where the Lord lived, that wasn't His destination. That was just a stopping place. Nor was it the house of friends in Capernaum, of which He said the city that He loved. That wasn't His destination. When the Lord Jesus came into the world His destination wasn't Jerusalem. That wasn't why He came. Nor was it even a cross upon which He died. Oh, He came to die on the cross. That wasn't His destination. Nor was it the tomb in which He was laid. Oh, He came and had to die and be buried. That wasn't His destination. Nor was it even to ascend from the tomb, raise from the dead, to then ascend into heaven. Sit down on the right hand of the throne on high. You see He had been there from eternity past. He didn't have to make this long journey to sit down at the right hand of the Father. When the Lord Jesus left heaven and came into the world His destination was your heart, your life. He had to make that long journey from eternity into time in order to remove all the legal barriers and hindrances, so that He could remake you in His image and fulfill the purpose for which you were made. You were made for God.

When God made us He craved into us an enormous empty place so big that nothing in the universe can fill it, but God. You made for God. And when He came into the world the destination that He had was to fill the empty place in your heart with Himself. And the hope of His calling was that when you were redeemed from the penalty of your past sins by His poured out life. And given the assurance of life eternal in Him. That you would not be content just a through ticket to heaven, just a paid up life, hell insurance policy. That you not be satisfied with anything less than the conscience in dwelling presences of the Lord Jesus Christ. The hope of His calling was the expectation that He would be free, because you would gladly "present once and for all your body as a living sacrifice," as Mary presented her body to the Holy Spirit. So you would present yours to Him, so He could live His life in you. His own life in you.

This was the hope of His calling as I understand it. That everyone redeemed by His blood would count it their "reasonable service to present their bodies as a living sacrifice." And invite the Lord Jesus Christ to live His life in and through them. As the hope the reasonable expectation the valid expectation based on reasonable grounds been realized in you.

Is the Lord Jesus been free to live His life in you last week and the week before? Well, that's an academic question. The important question is are you prepared that the Lord Jesus Christ should live His life in you. Tomorrow. Today and tomorrow. All the days that lay ahead that's one of the reasons we are here. One of the reasons for this camp meeting, so there can be given to you an opportunity. An insight into the Scriptures on the one hand. And an opportunity to respond to your discovered need on the other.

Now I can't say to you that there is some great magic in your coming to this altar. I know better than that. But I also know almost every major crisis in my life has been met as such an altar. When I had come to that point of such hunger, such desperation that I was prepared to acknowledge and seek the help of the Lord first and to make my need known to those who cared enough share with me and to pray with me. And we are going to give you an opportunity. We are just going to have a time of quiet prayer for a few moments. Whereas the meal will be served shortly. There is another meal that is more important and that is to answer the hope His calling. That ancient yearning that you would invite Him to live His life in you, His life in you.

We are just going to have a word of prayer. Let's stand now.

Then we are going to just sing as our director shows. Suggests briefly one verse to no pressure, but if you are here and God has spoken to your heart you can't wait because of the need you have, then we warmly ask you to come. Perhaps it's not the particular need that I have identified. But it is the need that you feel upper most in your heart.

Now Father of Jesus, Thou are here to bless. First to bless us with a blessing insight into our own selves. Our needs and our problems and our failures. And then to stir our hearts with the truth to the point we can expect because of the provision of Thy grace and the promises of Thy Word. That if we will respond, You'll meet us. And so we pray for those who are present. There are some here today Lord, have key very pressing needs and the most important thing that they could do today is to seek Thy face in prayer now. And so we ask all the unfinished business that is represented by us, will be cared for. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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