

Ephesians 1:1-14

Showered with Kindness

Leader: As we move as a group into a new season of exploring God's Word together, we'll begin with a metaphor from your kitchen or from your favorite restaurant.

- What will happen if you add some extra coffee in your filter as you brew your favorite blend of coffee for you to enjoy drinking with your friends?
- What will happen if you keep your tea bag dipped in your hot water for some extra time before you enjoy drinking tea with your friends?

As we come together expecting God to speak into our lives and into our relationships, our study will be stronger and richer if we allow some extra time to share observations and questions, to take a phrase-at-a-time, and to apply the words to our lives and relationships. We will need the Holy Spirit to lead us, so let's begin each group asking for His guidance. (*Allow time for group members to pray together.*)

Facilitator:

- Have you ever been through an adoption process with someone?
- Adoption can be a lengthy, complicated, and expensive process. What are some of the stages that families go through before, during, and after an adoption?
- Can you remember a season of your life when things were rough in your family and you secretly thought to yourself, "Wow, I wish I was part of a different family?"

Ephesians 1:1-14

Reader: Let's go around the group and read together a story about God's amazing adoption plan found in Ephesians 1:1-14.

Now let's read in unison God's plan for each of our lives.

“His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave Him great pleasure” (Ephesians 1:5 NLT).

Leader: Have you ever talked with a family member or a relative who reflected way back to times before you were even born? In his profound letter to the Ephesians, Paul takes us “waaaaaay” back to our Designer, the One who planned out our lives before He even created this world and long before He gave us our first breath.

The Designer, our Adoptive Father, painted a beautiful word picture for us to experience and enjoy. God loved us and chose us to be the recipients of His spiritual blessing. Picture God pouring out His wonderful kindness upon us by purchasing our freedom through the blood of Christ and by forgiving our sins. He showers us with wisdom and understanding. While God is smiling from ear-to-ear, we realize that we are loved and chosen by God, and we are completely free from the penalty of our sins. We are now His own children. We now belong, and we have a Christ-centered identity. And to prove it, God has sealed us with His Holy Spirit, guaranteeing our identity and our inheritance from God. We belong to His dearly-loved Son!

Facilitator: Go ahead and draw what you pictured in your mind as you heard these words. *(Remember to provide paper, drawing materials, and unburied time. You get to create a safe space for the Holy Spirit to work in, through, and between us. Be prepared for the diversity of expressions that unfold. The artists will be all over this opportunity. Some of your left-brained people may want to make this a completely-cognitive experience. Some may feel self-conscious and say, “I can't draw.” Some may experience anxiety and want to fill the room with words and to interrupt the work of the Spirit in the hearts of your group members. You may want to turn on some quiet, soothing music to help create a peaceful, safe space for people to create.*

You may also feel pressure to over-function and create something for others to see or experience. Just relax and let the Holy Spirit lead. All of the internal and external dynamics of your group will likely “bit-the-fan” during this initial opportunity to creatively process God’s Word. Some people in your group may have never even thought of drawing God’s Word-pictures that we find throughout Scripture. Relax and trust God and the people He brought into your life and group experience.)

- As you are drawing this Biblical word-picture, how is the Holy Spirit expanding your concept of God?
- How will this word-picture impact how you see and understand and relate to yourself?
- What impact would you like it have on how you see and relate to one another?
- When do you need a shower of kindness reminding you that you belong, you are loved, you are His, and that God is delighted with you?
- What are some of the reasons why you hold back from showering people with God’s kindness and love?
- What was this first NTD 2 group like for you?
- Name one thing you learned today about God, yourself, or someone in our group.
- What is one way you hope to apply something you have learned from our group today?

Leader: Today you were introduced to some mind, life, and relationship-altering truths that can change you. They’ll need some time to sink in. If you allow yourself and the Holy Spirit time this week to sit with the words and images and connections in this passage, the Holy Spirit may lead you to know and experience what’s been desperately missing and needed in your life. Here’s your personal invitation and challenge.

TAKING THE NTD CHALLENGE

NTD level 1 challenge: Carve out time this week to just sit with this text. Unclutter your mind. Anticipate the words and truths of this passage to collide with some of your limited understanding of God, yourself, and people. Don't be surprised if the Holy Spirit begins to do some house-cleaning. Some of your internalized images and messages may collide with the eternal truths that you will be introduced to in this initial part of your NTD 2 experience. Don't shrink back from spiritual challenges by rejecting what your mind has trouble grasping.

NTD level 2 challenge: Expand your understanding of this initial passage in Ephesians by looking up some of the related biblical texts that will help unpack its meaning. Genesis 1. 1 Peter 1:20. James 1:5. Jeremiah 9:23-24. Philippians 2:9-11. Galatians 4:3-7.

NTD level 3 challenge: Take a pen and a highlighter, and circle or underline the names and words you find below each time you see them in this passage. Begin drawing or making mental and spiritual connections each time these words are found or mentioned in this Ephesians 1:1-14 NLT passage. Anticipate the Holy Spirit breaking into your experience to teach you and to give you new insights.

- "Jesus Christ"
- "long ago"
- "praise"
- "belong"
- "kindness"
- "plan"

Closing Prayer: Lord, Help us to "live in" and "live out" a Christ-centered worldview that leads us to sing in the shower, smile in the mirror, smile and encourage one another, and offer as a group the love of Christ that our world desperately needs to feel. Amen.