

## **Union With Christ**

### ***Paul's Letter to the Ephesians***

#### **How the Father Loves**

##### ***Ephesians 1:3 – 14***

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#### **Introduction: The Basis for Experiencing God**

My son John was born last September, after a marathon 55 hours of labor, 3 shifts of doctors, 2 hours of pushing, and a last minute C section. Obviously, Ming was exhausted, and I was probably the most tired I had ever been, so when the nurses started to lift John out, I wasn't sure how I would feel. I walked over to the table where the pediatrician was cleaning him, and the first thing I thought was, "Yup, he's got my nose." He was crying pretty loudly. Now some babies recognize their mommy and daddy's voices from the time they're in the womb. I guess that's what happened there, because when I started talking to him, he stopped crying. At that moment, I felt my heart sing. I thought, You're my son!, and I felt deeply connected to him. In my mind, I started writing him a poem about where his name comes from and why we think it's meaningful. When we left the hospital, and I found that I could watch him for hours and not be bored. I'd wait for him to open his eyes, and then I'd wait for him to smile. I've even found that I cannot kiss him enough, and though I didn't think I would call my son "cute," indeed I think he is "cute." In fact, one time Ming complained that I was holding him too much. She once said, "Hey, give him to me, the boy needs to eat!!!" And, "I hold him just to nurse him, but you get to play with him all the time!"

Now as I reflected on that episode, it hit me that part of the reason I had such strong feelings for my son is that for about eight years, I have done ministry to at-risk kids. And what I've seen has broken my heart. Some of them have no parents, most have no dad's, some have no one to give them a basic sense of love and structure and encouragement and order. But I felt like I could never do that much, because they weren't my children. They were outside of me and my family. But all those years of working with at-risk kids grew in me a desire to be a good dad to my own children. When John was born, it felt like all my feelings for the at-risk kids I knew could finally be expressed. And I had this thought: To the extent that I can do things right as a dad by the Spirit of God, if only I could love each and every one of the kids I have ever known through my son John, that I could somehow bring them inside my family through John and that by loving John I could be loving them.

What I cannot do is exactly what God does. He is a Father to His one and only Son, Jesus. And though there are many who are outside His family, He desires to bring inside His family by offering them Jesus. He says, 'Come to My Son, Jesus. Join your life to his, absolutely, with no holds barred.' Why does He do that? Because once we give our lives to Jesus and join our lives to his, Jesus brings us into himself. God is able to do that somehow. So this is THE FOUNDATION OF HOW GOD LOVES US: He adopts us into his family, not just by adding extra sons and daughters who are second-class citizens in the family and who always feel a little awkward about it, but by bringing us into His one and only Son Jesus. Jesus is absolutely unique in that way, different from Buddha, Krishna, Mohammed, and Moses. Look at the phrase 'in Christ.' The phrase "in him" or "in Christ" or "in the Beloved" occurs 12 times (v.1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 10, 12, 13, 13) in the first 14 verses alone! To the faithful in Christ Jesus. God has blessed you in Christ. He chose you in Christ. He adopted you through Jesus. He is gathering all things in Christ. Everything happens to us in Jesus. It's almost as if Jesus is a physical place. God is the actor; Jesus is the agent through whom God saves people, forgives them, and transforms them. How does He do that? He takes his own experience of being loved by his Father, and he shares it with us. Jesus actually helps us to experience what he experiences, right here and right now.

#### **Context:**

The passage we're looking at together is pure rocket fuel. It's called Ephesians and it's what Paul would say if you sat him down and said, 'Tell me about Jesus and your experience of him.' If you didn't come to him with a problem to solve or a question to answer, and you just let him talk, this is what you'd get: Ephesians. All the other letters he wrote were responses the problems or questions, but not this one. This is what Paul really wants everyone to know.

You read how he begins his letter. In the original Greek language, this is one long sentence, running on and on without punctuation. It's a poetic statement about what God is doing, and who we become if we come to Jesus. This passage is the fountainhead from which the rest of Ephesians flows. In fact, it is the basis for Paul's expectation in 1:15 – 2:10 that we would experience the same power Jesus experienced in his resurrection. Resurrection power – we're supposed to experience it! It's also the basis for Paul's expectation in 3:14 – 21 that we would experience God dwelling in us as He dwells in Jesus. God's presence in us – we're supposed to experience it! In all these cases, it is because Jesus shares those things with us. This is the FOUNDATION NOT MERELY OF BELIEVING THINGS ABOUT GOD, BUT OF OUR DIRECT EXPERIENCE OF GOD.

### **God's Fatherhood: v.3**

Paul begins this section in v.3 with how God and Jesus are related. 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.' It's really easy to blip over that. Of course God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! That seems like a no-brainer. If you want to know what I'm like as a father, you have to understand John and Zoe's experience as my children. Someone else's children couldn't tell you what I'm like as a father. The same is true with God. God defines how He is a Father by how He loves on Jesus His Son. That is absolutely critical, because we're going to experience THEIR RELATIONSHIP.

The problem is that your picture of God as Father is probably colored by how your dad (or apa, or ba, or o-tosan) treated you, even if its in reaction to what you felt you didn't get with your dad. For example, I shared last night that my dad – I love him very much – left an impression on me of being angry. Like many Asian-American dads, all that mattered with my dad is whether I got straight A's. Have you ever had that experience with your dad? Dad, I got 5 A's and 1 B: 'Where'd the B come from? Do better next time.' Dad, I got 5 A's and an A minus: 'Why the minus? Do better next time.' And then I had to do it again and again! At home, he either had no expression on his face, or an angry expression. And, he was fairly distant. He didn't tell stories about himself; I didn't know things about his life until my senior year in college. For that reason, I thought of God as either stoic or angry, and distant. I had to change my performance oriented view of God, as if God were always angry about my report card. Now, John and Zoe have me as their dad. So they're going to be shaped by my limitations, and my quirky sense of humor. So they might grow up subconsciously thinking that God is going to sit on them and fart on them or something! For some of you, maybe your dad is great, so God feels approachable and warm to you. Even so, there are always ways in which God is different and fuller and more complete as a Father. For some of you, perhaps your dad didn't communicate a whole lot, so God feels silent to you. Or maybe your dad was vain and proud, so you think of God as vain and proud. We all do this to some extent. But if and when you do that, then you're not experiencing God as the Father He really is. You're experiencing *your dad* as if he were God. Let me say that again: You may not be experiencing God as the Father He really is; you're experiencing *your dad* as if *he* were God.

The great news is that God says, 'You want to understand what kind of Father I am? Look at how I'm a Father to Jesus.' We have to look at that. Jesus has always had this AMAZING relationship with God. I want you to enter into Jesus' experience with me here. Let me highlight three moments where that relationship became clear to us. First, when Jesus began his public role in Israel in Luke 3, his Father's voice from heaven shouted, 'You are My Son, My beloved, in whom I am well pleased.' If my mom and dad said anything publicly about me, with extended family or with other parents, it was something like this: 'Mako did okay, but he has a lot to learn.' You know it's kind of a compliment but also a put down. It's saying, 'Let's not forget how far you have to go. Don't let your head get big.' But God doesn't do that kind of thing to Jesus. In front of many, many people, God shouts from heaven, 'You are My Son, My beloved, in whom I am well pleased.' No holds barred, no caveats, no nothing! Had Jesus really done anything yet? No. But still his Father made a very public declaration of how thrilled He is with him. That is amazing. But there's more. Second, in John 5, Jesus said that all the miracles that he did were NOT actually him; it was him with his Father: 'The Son can do nothing of himself, unless it is something he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all things that He Himself is doing, and greater works than these will He show him, that you may marvel.' (Jn.5:19 – 20) Imagine what it was like for Jesus. What would it be like to sense God, feel God, and hear God every second of your life, working through you and around you.

Third, Jesus' resurrection. There was only one moment when Jesus did not have his Father: his death on the cross. (And even then scholars debate whether the Father actually left him, since Scripture says, 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.') God didn't leave Jesus to rot; in the pit of Jesus' deadness, God poured out His power and love and He resurrected Jesus. So Jesus has put that terrible moment behind him forever. And as Jesus looks forward, all he can see is an eternity of his Father loving on him.

### **New Identity – Adopted INTO Jesus: v.3 – 5**

Now after all that, you might say, 'Well, that's nice...for Jesus. But what does that mean for US?' It means that WE DEFINITELY WANT GOD TO ADOPT US!! And thank goodness He does, when we come to Jesus. Those three moments – Jesus' baptism, his miracles, and his resurrection – are going to be very significant for us.

Notice all the ways this passage stresses adoption. First, look at v.4 – 5. 'Just as He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him; in love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.' Briefly, the reason Paul talks about 'adoption as sons' this way is not because he's sexist; it's because 'adoption as a son' is a phrase from an earlier story. Biblical language is an art like rap music; for example Puff Daddy took an earlier song called Every Breath You Take by the Police, which was about a stalker who just can't get over the fact that his girlfriend broke up with him, and is now saying, 'I'm always thinking about you' and 'We will meet again.' Puff Daddy makes the song called I'll Be Missing You, which is about his dead friend Notorious BIG, and reworks those themes to say, 'I'm always thinking about you' and 'We will meet again.' Now when Paul uses the phrase 'adoption as sons' he's sampling from an earlier story. This is what God said He was doing when He delivered Israel out of Egypt. Men and women together in Israel were chosen to be God's special people. So in Romans 9:4, Paul says of Israel *as a community*, 'To them belongs the adoption as sons.' (See also Exodus 4:22, where God said, 'Israel is My firstborn son.') In fact, the idea of being God's chosen people runs through this section. 'Redemption' in v.7 is language from Exodus, when God delivered Israel out of Egypt, like in the movie *The Prince of Egypt*, that is the first picture of redemption. And 'inheritance' in v.14 also comes from the Exodus out of Egypt, when God gave His chosen people their inheritance in the Promised Land. This is all about being the chosen people.

Do you know why this is important? One reason is some of you don't feel chosen. You feel like a burden. You may even feel like the mistake in the family. Your parents didn't plan to get pregnant with you. You're the one who reminds your parents of walking 5 miles to school, through the snow, uphill, both ways. But if someone ADOPTS you, they lose the ability to say ANYTHING LIKE THAT, don't they?!? God adopts you! He chooses you! He doesn't feel like you're a burden, otherwise, why would He choose you?

AND HE EVEN MAKES US ROYALTY! There's another level of meaning. 'Adopted son' is also the coronation title of every king of Israel. Whenever a new king of Israel came to the throne as an adult, someone anointed him with oil and read Psalm 2 over him. That poem reads, 'You are My son, today I have begotten you.' His enthronement was considered the moment when God adopted him as a son. Now Jesus is the ultimate king of Israel. And this is where it gets really cool. When Jesus began his public role in Israel, he marched off to the wilderness where his cousin John the Baptist was baptizing people – symbolically cleansing them – in the Jordan River. Jesus went under the water and when he came up, THAT'S when God anointed him with His Spirit as king. Then God said the words of Psalm 2 over him. 'You are My Son' – that's Psalm 2! So when we are adopted into Jesus, Jesus shares his royalty with us, his power with us, his honor with us. So if you are a Christian woman, you are a royal daughter of God who is adopted into Jesus the Royal Son. If you are a Christian man, you are a royal son of God who is adopted into Jesus the Royal Son.

That's important because some of you don't like yourself. Maybe you've had some bad experiences. Maybe you've internalized some of that. Maybe you've internalized some words of criticism that play like a broken CD round and round your mind. Or, many of you don't have a strong sense of yourself as an adult yet. Maybe if you're a man, you may feel like your dad never gave you a blessing that said, 'You are a man.' Maybe if you're a woman, you may feel like your dad didn't quite know what to do with you once you hit puberty. You haven't felt affirmed as a woman. But God offers you honor and a new identity in

Jesus. He offers you royalty in Jesus. Let me emphasize that in that cultural context, adoption was not done with little children, but with adults, to bestow adult honor on you. How does the Father love us? First and foremost, He makes us adult Kings and Queens in His royal family. He sees who are in Jesus and who we will be for the rest of our lives, and He says over us, 'You are My beloved daughter. You are My beloved son.'

Illus: There was a moment when this came home powerfully for me. In 1995, there was one weekend where a lot of things collided. I had just moved into an inner city neighborhood for the first time, and I was asking a lot of questions, like, 'What am I doing here?' As an Asian-American among Mexican immigrant families, I felt very out of place. Also, some friends from college didn't want to come over; they were afraid their cars would be broken into, so I felt out of place with them. I was struggling with being in the working world, feeling out of place there, too. My parents had recently got their divorce, so I felt forgotten and damaged in some ways. And over this one weekend, I had told this girl that I liked her, but she told me she didn't see us as more than friends. So that Monday, I just couldn't do anything. I went to go sit in my car at lunch. I just cried. Then I heard God whisper, 'I'm proud of you.' I listened for more, because I was expecting a stern voice to say, 'But you have a lot to learn' or something like that. I said to God, 'So where's the *but*?' And what was amazing was that there was no *but*. Sure, I had (and have) things to learn, but that didn't change God being proud of me. God doesn't give backhanded compliments. 'I'm proud of you.' Period.

### **New Intimacy – Being IN the Beloved One, Jesus: v.5 – 6**

Have you heard God say that to you? You might ask, 'What's the basis for that? Why should I hope to experience something like that?' It's because Jesus hears that kind of thing ALL THE TIME. Is God proud of Jesus? Of course! Jesus wants to share his experience with us. So if you are in Jesus, you should expect something like that. That's why our adoption is in v.5 'through Jesus Christ to Himself.' Jesus is an adoption agent. He's the one into whom we are adopted. And notice in v.6, Jesus is 'the beloved.' There's that term of honor and affection again. That's what God said to Jesus at Jesus' baptism: 'My beloved. You are My Son, My beloved.' That's what God says to Jesus, and Jesus takes his experience and makes it ours. That's why in v.6, God takes His grace and love and 'freely bestowed [them] on us in the beloved.'

I'm struck that when a person comes to Jesus, it FREES God to freely bestow His love on that person. But it makes a lot of sense, too. In 2001, my wife and I had the chance to be caregivers for one young sister and brother; their mom (a single mom) started working two jobs, and their older brother had gone to juvie lock-up and their older sister had just gotten pregnant. We had these two younger kids live with us. It was not always easy. What surprised me was that the more I got to know them, the more I understood the neglect and abuse they had gone through, the more I wanted to give them. I wanted to give them more attention and structure, but that wasn't totally appropriate. I wanted to sit down with their teachers and help them in school, but that wasn't totally appropriate either. I wanted to say to them, 'Look, I'll set aside some money for you to go to college,' but that wasn't appropriate either. I wanted to treat them the same way I treated John and Zoe, but I couldn't; I wasn't free to do that because they weren't my children. They were only temporary guests in our family who belonged to someone else; their future was elsewhere. That's one of the reasons now why I personally would prefer to adopt kids. I really admire people who can be foster parents, because it's tough knowing that those kids you care about will be taken from you again. My personality is such that I want to adopt. I want a permanent arrangement, so that I can be free to dream with them, plan with them, be affectionate with them, and shape their lives.

With all due respect, God is not a foster parent, and He is not happy with temporary arrangements because He sees what you've been through, He knows your pain, and He wants you, all of you, all of your future. He wants to call you His, and His alone. Look at what motivates Him at the end of v.5, 'according to the kind intention of His will' and again in v.9, 'according to His kind intention which He purposed in him.' God sees us, and He wants to become our Father. Not in the way our natural fathers did it, not like a distant legal guardian, but in the way HE REALLY IS a Father – with Jesus. Now, we do need to choose Him too, according to v.13, 'having also believed [in Jesus] you were sealed in him.' So God requires our consent to adopt us. God will not and cannot freely love on someone who is not His child in Jesus. But to those who say 'yes' to Him, He can freely bestow not just kind words here and there, but ALL OF HIS GRACE in v.6 or EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING in v.3.

'Grace' is a big word; literally it means unmerited favor. It does include 'forgiveness' as we'll see in v.7 but, in this context of God's family, it also means empowerment, blessing, a special investment, so that Paul in 4:7 can use the word 'grace' to speak of special gifts and strengths that God invests into His children. 'To each one of us grace was given,' and then he talks about those particular gifts. That is a PART of what Paul means here in v.6, 'to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the beloved.' If so, then here's something I want to tell you. There are things that God told Jesus ahead of time about what his life would be like and who he would encounter. So, will He do that for us in Jesus? Will He pour out empowering grace on us? I think so.

Illus: There was a time when my wife and I went to pray with some older Christians. One of those people was someone I had never met before. He and I had never had a conversation before, and he didn't know me at all, but when he prayed for me, God told him fairly personal things about me! This guy knew how I hoped God would work through my life. He described my strengths and gifts more accurately than anyone has. As he was praying about me, I thought, 'How the heck does he know this about me?' It's because God was telling him. He even described my future to me – not all of it, of course, but one aspect of it. And he said that God would give me another grace, blessing, gift, or ability that would be important in my future, both to others and to me. That later turned out to be true. I walked away from that time blown away. I felt like God had given me a very personal and very custom-made blessing, the kind of blessing that a loving father would give each of his children. God was free to discuss my future with me. God gave that kind of blessing to Jesus; Jesus takes his blessing and makes it ours, crafting it for each of us in our uniqueness. Don't you want God to tell you, 'I see you. I know your strengths. You will accomplish great things with Me, and I have even more gifts to give you. You're only 20 years old; you've only begun to experience Me.' Don't we all want that? Tonight, we'll have the opportunity to pray and listen for God's voice. But if you want to get started this morning, don't hold back! Go ahead!

#### **New Innocence: Redeemed and Forgiven IN Jesus: v.7 – 8**

Now some of you might be asking, 'How did these things happen to you, Mako? I thought God just forgives us, and that's it. But how can He love us the way He loves Jesus? How can God do this, especially because we are not as lovable as Jesus is? We have so many problems and limitations and faults and sin?' The answer is in v.7: He redeems us. 'In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.'

Redemption is a deliverance, a transfer, a move from a bad place to a good place. Let's think about the older story Paul is sampling from: the Israel out of Egypt story. When God brought Israel out of Egypt, He redeemed them. He did that because He told them to mark their doors with the blood of a Passover Lamb. Remember that Paul is consistently thinking about Israel's story. He's using adoption, redemption, blood, and inheritance – that's the Exodus sequence. Now v.7 says, 'In him we have redemption through his blood.' Jesus is a new kind of Passover Lamb. It's because his blood was shed that God can redeem us from one family to another.

That's important because when I was younger, I didn't get it. I thought that God poured out His anger on Jesus and had nothing leftover for me. So in effect, I thought God tricked Himself into forgiving me while letting me be the same person I was before. Some of you believe that. But that's incomplete, and let me show you how: Imagine some little punk kid off the street vandalizes your house, smashes your car windows, and steals from you and others in the neighborhood. Imagine that you say, 'Hey, if you want, I'll forgive you because I've figured out a way to be okay with who you are and you being out on the street.' Have you redeemed that child? NO. Now imagine instead that you said to that child, 'If you want, I'll care for you, take you into my house, provide for you, fill out the adoption papers, and make you a part of my family. If I bring you that close to me, of course that means I forgive you for what you did. But it also means more.' And if that child says yes, have you redeemed that child? YES. Now what does God do with us? The second route. Redemption is about God transforming US, our core identity. It involves forgiveness, of course. But it's forgiveness rooted not merely in a change in HIM but a change in YOU. He takes YOU from an old life into a new one. Paul says in the sister letter to Ephesians, Colossians 1:13 – 14, 'For [God] rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, *in whom* we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.'

What's the story here? God wanted to adopt a bunch of rebel children from an enemy family into His own family in order to love them and transform them. In order to do that, He had to get them to die to their own identity. So God sent His royal son Jesus, His only son, to gather them. But in an ironic plot twist, we rejected Jesus and killed him on the cross as our enemy. But that didn't stop God's plan, in fact, it was the only way God's plan could unfold. As he died, Jesus entered our place as rebels, because crucifixion was for rebels. Jesus entered into our rebellion and took it down. He entered into our sin and took it down. He entered into our death and took it down with him. But he came out the other side. God resurrected Jesus. He said, 'No, that is My Son,' and then He opened that same way up to others who would follow Jesus. So the new ironic twist is that to be adopted into God's family, we must die with Jesus to their old allegiances, our old identity as a rebel, as someone who once said 'no' to God. We have to agree that we need our old identity to die. And it does. We die to our old identity with Jesus, only to rise again with him on the other side of all that, fundamentally transformed and empowered to live a new life. We die to *our* old life. We rise into *Jesus'* new life. That's why in v.7, it's not just '*because of what he did* we have redemption through his blood,' but '*in him* we have redemption through his blood.' God redeems us, moves us, He delivers us, He transfers us out from sin and into Jesus.

But perhaps the key aspect of redemption is a change in who is our Lord. Notice that when God redeemed Israel out of Egypt, He became their king. Pharaoh was gone from their lives. When God redeems us, He transfers us from our own rule, the rule of our family, the rule of other people, the rule of our past mistakes and failures, the rule of fear of the future, or the rule of wishy-washy relativism, into Jesus' RULE. HE defines us. HE calls the shots. And HE begins to transform us.

(How does God continue to transform us? IN HIS PRESENCE. God stayed with Israel, He led them, and He got close to them in the form of a radiant pillar of fire. But that wasn't enough. He redeemed them out of Egypt, but He didn't redeem them out of sin yet. As a result, Israel fell into sin repeatedly and got exiled into Babylon, Persia, Greece, and then Rome. During the Roman occupation, they were waiting for their second redemption, which Isaiah, Jeremiah and others called 'the forgiveness of sins,' the 'new exodus,' and the 'new redemption.' Jesus came to do and be that. So Jesus redeems us OUT OF SIN and INTO HIMSELF. In the context of that deep intimacy, He begins to transform us.)

Illus: In November, a situation came up in my life that reminded me of the reality of my being in Jesus. It was a situation that involved other people and fairly deep needs, and Ming and I were asked whether we could be involved. Now I had a lot of thoughts and feelings about this. A big part of me wanted to jump in and help; I felt needed and I felt like it was a good match in some ways. Another part of me felt arrogant, as if I was not just going to help, but be the one to solve the whole situation. Another part of me felt some fears and concerns about being involved, many of them legitimate and some of them not. So it just wasn't clear, and it was an opportunity for me to wrestle with fairly deep things inside me, one of them being my ambition. As I was praying about this, I read a short book that a friend of mine had given me as a gift. It had a prayer recorded in it that expressed exactly what I needed. And as I read it out loud, I felt a burning sensation in my chest, as if I had put Chinese tiger balm on myself. I had the sense that God was placing His finger right on my heart, looking right into my eyes, and saying, 'I know you. And I know this situation. Let's work through this together.' I have felt His touch like that on a few occasions, not a lot but a few. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, also spoke of his heart being strangely warmed. Other people I know have felt His touch in different ways. In my case, every time, it's the Father's invitation to me that I wrestle very deeply with Him and myself in ways I really need to if I'm going to grow, since some things about me change very slowly. I don't feel like He gave me a specific direction, but I do feel like He did some internal work in me.

My point here is that a lot of the time we think that our 'issues' cause God to become distant, to somehow go away. Or we think of God as always being distant. I've noticed that Asian-American Christians especially sing worship songs having to do with 'Draw me close to you – I feel far, bring me near.' It reminds me of Grover on Sesame Street: 'Hello boys and girls, today we're going to learn about near and far.' I've been there, too, so I feel like I need to say a word of caution. Yes, the language of drawing near to God does occur in the New Testament in James and Hebrews, but it's a figurative expression that means 'draw on His power – it's totally available!' We're not to imagine that God is far away from us, as if

there's this exhausting distance you have to cross. Some of you feel that because you assume that all authority figures are emotionally distant from you, starting with your natural father and going all the way up to God. But let me say the obvious again, your dad is not God. God is a Father as He fathers Jesus. Is He distant from Jesus? NO. So if you have truly come to Jesus, God SURROUNDS you in Jesus; He SATURATES you in Jesus; in v.13 we see that He SEALS you by His Spirit in Jesus. When you want to change the taste of meat, what do you do? You marinate it in something. So when God wants to change us, He marinates us in Jesus. ('Not enough flavor? More soy sauce! More garlic! More spice!') When God works to change our self-centeredness and whatever else, HE DOESN'T TAKE AWAY HIS PRESENCE. HE INTENSIFIES IT.

How does that look? Maybe you'll experience something physical or almost physical, like I did. Maybe God will give you a picture in your mind. At times you'll find that certain Scriptures stand out to you – that might be God speaking. There have been three times in my life where a passage of Scripture drew my attention for over a year each. There was a purpose for that each time. Or, you might find that other people happen to say words or phrases that stick out to you. We just need to recognize how His Spirit works. That's part of how the Father loves us. So sometimes when you are trying to decide what to do after graduating, how to use your time now, what to major in, what people to commit to, many times God won't give you a clear answer. Sometimes He might, but at other times, He won't. But regardless, He wants to give you an experience of Himself. He'll remind you that He is here, and that He's using that occasion to train us to sense His presence, because there will come a day when He will clearly say, 'Let's do this!'

#### **New Purpose, Family, Hope – The Summing Up of All Things in Jesus: v.9 – 14**

From this point, you can just take the concept of being in Jesus and either read on in Ephesians and/or extrapolate all that that means for us. Why is Jesus unique among all other figures of religion and history? Because he was uniquely God's Son. And if God is drawing people into Jesus, He must want a big family. And that's what v.9 – 10 say: 'He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention...that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.' If you've ever wondered what God's will is, it is to have a big family. That's great for us because who wouldn't want to be part of a great family?

And in v.11 – 14, Jesus shares his inheritance with us. God has kind, loving intentions towards all those who don't know Him as Father. If you're not a Christian, this is what I hope you remember from this: God wants more and more people, including you, to experience Him as Father. And in general, we all need to know this: sharing Jesus on campus is the most important activity you could engage in while you're here. It's actually not picking your major and getting good grades. That's important in a subordinate and secondary way, but the thing of primary importance is to seek to expand God's family. Later when you graduate, you'll need to share Jesus in your neighborhood and your workplace. It's not just an extra activity. It is the central activity. Why? It's right here – God's will is to bring people into Jesus. So that helps us put things in perspective. Do you want to share in the Father's heart? Do you want to experience more and more of Him? Share in this. God is a big daddy, and He wants a big family, and He wants us to share in His joy every time He can adopt someone.

Illus: When Zoe was born, John was 2 years old. For two years, John had mom and dad all to himself. Now, someone else was coming into the family. Would John be able to share mom and dad and the whole house with his new baby sister? Ming and I worried about all the sibling rivalry stuff. Well, Zoe was born on October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2002, also by C-section because there were risks that our gynecologist didn't want to take. So after Zoe was born, I went back home to get John. Between the car and the hospital, John stopped. He picked up a little acorn, and he looked up at me and said, 'For Zoe?' I just about melted. Not only did he want to bring her a gift on their first meeting, but 'Zoe' was the first two syllable word he ever said straight through without pausing. I was so proud of him. Why? Because he shared IN MY EXCITEMENT TO ADD ANOTHER PERSON INTO OUR FAMILY. He shared in MY HEART AND MY HAPPINESS. I put a pin into that acorn and tied a ribbon around it and every year we bring it out and hang it on our Christmas tree. It's our most precious ornament.

That is how God wants to share His joy and His happiness. He wants His heart to be in us, and our experience of Him is often the most intense and vibrant when we share in God's desire. He wants to adopt

others. He wants our fellowship to continually be open to new adopted brothers and sisters, since we're all adopted, too. And He wants to work through me and you to make that invitation. How does God want to change the world? How does He want to undo and heal the evil and brokenness of our world? It's by offering Jesus to people.

How does the Father look? How does the Father love? He is an adopting Father, who runs out to make an invitation: Come to Jesus, and come INTO Jesus. He LOVES to be our Father, too. Tonight we're going to explore God's generosity some more and the role of God's Spirit in this. We touched on the Spirit's role here. We'll see more of that tonight. I'm looking forward to it.