

JOURNEY INTO A HOPE-FILLED LIFE

Seeds of Hope
from Ephesians
and Beyond

Clark Tatum



Sunset Institute Press

3710 34th Street ❖ Lubbock, Texas
806/788-3280/1 ❖ extschool@sibi.cc

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Introduction

This *Journey into a Hope-Filled Life* will nourish the hearts of those individuals who direct their attention to the only real source of hope – which is God and His Word. It is refreshing to know God desires we be a people overflowing with hope. Romans 15:13, ¹³ *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.* Most people would like to live with a little more hope. This book will take us on a journey over some prayerfully selected seeds of hope from the letter of Ephesians and beyond. We will draw upon Bible principles that will reinforce our hope in Christ.

When we slow down and survey the world around us, it appears we live in a world filled with hopelessness instead of hope. As Christians there is no reason for us to be short on hope. In fact, we are to spread an aroma of hope in the midst of the odor of hopelessness. There are good smells and bad smells. There are good smells like fresh homemade rolls out of the oven or the smell of a new car. Then there are bad smells like spoiled milk or rotten eggs.

When we lived in the Texas Panhandle, we could walk out our front door when the wind was blowing a certain direction and smell the foul odor from the nearby cattle feedlots. The smell was not inviting to us. I learned later it smelled much different to those who owned all those cattle. What smells good or bad has a lot to do with what we have been taught, or maybe more accurately what we have caught along the way. It is my prayer all Christians will resolve to be a people who overflow with the sweet

fragrance of hope. Genuine hope is refreshing, inviting, and attractive.

In my book *Journey into a Fruit-Filled Life*, I was hopeful the readers would shower themselves in the entire list of the fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22-23. The fruit of the Spirit, like love, joy, and patience smells especially good in the common reality of a loveless, joyless, impatient world. God's way to live life is absolutely the best way. What is the result of living by the fruit of the Spirit? What is the result of living a hope-filled life? We are able to spread a beautiful aroma in our world wherever we are to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 2:14-16, ¹⁴ *But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.* ¹⁵ *For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.* ¹⁶ *To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? What a beautiful word picture – the fragrance of life.*

There are two distinct smells we discharge as we live out our Christian lives in a non-Christian world. The location in which people find themselves in life's journey will determine the scent they give off when others are around them. To people who are tired of living hopeless lives we present a hope-filled pleasing aroma of life. We either will be the kind of person people enjoy being around or the kind of person people will try to avoid. They will either be curious and want to know more about the God who has

infused our lives with His Spirit, or they will readily refuse to hear God's plan for abundant life. We may encounter some individuals who may not only refuse to hear more, they may even oppose God's very meaning of life.

Our hope based on God's love will be confusing for those who do not know anything about biblical hope or God's love. Hope and love commonly have a distorted definition in this world from biblical hope and love. As a result, while this contrast may be inviting to some people, to others it may be repulsive because they cannot believe such hope and love are possible. There will be people who simply do not understand God's kind of love or enduring eternal hope.

When we reflect a spirit of hope and love in times of trial, the people around us who do not know God will be confused as to how we could possibly have any kind of hope. It might be almost repulsive to them because they cannot fathom such endless hope or marvelous love. In such cases, we might do well to remember our own experience in accepting such hope and love when it was first introduced to us. Thankfully, for many of us there were a few Christians that did not give up on us. These believers graciously put up with the many barriers we attempted to place between ourselves and them. And over time we came to the realization that these people had something uniquely special and we wanted it too.

When we start asking around what life is all about, we readily receive a host of different answers. Many do ask such questions about life because they are without hope and realize in all their efforts to have hope, hope has

alluded them. The answers we receive to our life's questions are only as good as where they originate. God designed life and He did it with great pleasure and eternal purpose. No less than seven times in Genesis 1 we find the phrase "*it was good.*" And as God observed all He had made in Genesis 1:31, we can read He said, "*it was very good.*"

God is good and we have the responsibility to direct people to what God says about abundant life and everlasting hope. Solomon, in Ecclesiastes, took on a research project like no other. He personally wanted to know where he could find meaning and purpose in life. He began his quest to find satisfaction in life and experimented with many things people do today. He used his wealth, education, and creative mind to find a meaningful, hope-filled life.

Solomon used a common phrase that he came back to again and again. He said, "*Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless*" (Ecclesiastes 1:2b). The word "meaningless" in the New International Version is found 32 times in Ecclesiastes. Other Bible translations like the English Standard Version and the New American Standard Bible uses the phrase, "*Vanity of vanities! All is vanity*" (Ecclesiastes 1:2). The words "*vanity*" or "*meaningless*" indicates no redeeming or lasting value.

It is hard to have hope when we come to the conclusion everything under the sun is empty, futile, and meaningless. Although, it is important to note that Solomon did not come to that conclusion at the end of his research experiment. He came to a much different conclusion by the end of Ecclesiastes. 12:13, ¹³ *Now all has been heard; here is the*

conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man.

Many believe today and perhaps we have thought this same way in the past, “If only I could get that degree, or next degree – then I’ll be happy and satisfied!” Maybe we have said, “When I get a better job, a bigger house, a nicer car, then I can enjoy life and have hope in this hopeless world.” Solomon tried all these things and much more in his search for meaning in life, but he came to the conclusion that we are to revere and respect the Creator and stay with His plan for living life. It is Solomon’s conclusion that will bring us in our day to receive the fragrance of life by following our Creator.

There is nothing sadder than a person living without hope. Even some who claim to have hope today are void of the hope we find in the New Testament. Hope in the New Testament is connected to having a relationship with Jesus. Genuine hope comes from knowing Jesus, obeying Jesus, and by walking by faith with Him every day. The New Testament teaches us we can have an abundance of hope because *God leads us in triumphal procession in Christ*. Therefore, the fragrance we obtain from the God of hope signifies we have been blessed with eternal life.

I was not exactly sure where I would begin in Scripture to write a book on hope. There were multiple verses that came to the forefront of my mind. There are a number of places in the Bible we could go to begin a journey on hope. It was after much prayer and consideration, I decided to begin my exploration on the subject of hope from God’s letter to the Christians in Ephesus.

The following though Ecclesiastes is where our journey on hope will take us. We can find hope in living in God's pleasure. We can find hope in God's presence. We can find hope in God's praying people. We can find hope in God's power. We can find hope in God's precious love. We can find hope in God's provision. We can find hope in God's promise. We can find hope in God's purpose. We can find hope in God's plea for unity. We can find hope in God's perfect attire. We can find hope in God's path. We can find hope in God's plan. We can find hope in God's protection. May God bless our study into a hope-filled life.

Chapter 1

FIND HOPE IN GOD'S PLEASURE

(Ephesians 1:1-10)

There are few words that resonate with more meaning or give more strength to us in life than the word hope. What a sharp contrast between the person who has hope and the person who has no hope. We will be exploring the idea of biblical hope through this book as we direct our attention to "The Book." It is in the book we call the Bible where we find the foundation for solid hope.

Christian hope comes from being in Christ and learning about what He has accomplished for people of faith. The idea of hope is often misunderstood. Christian hope is distinctly different from the concept of hope held by the majority of people. Many people claim to have hope, but their hope eludes them in life's storms. Why does hope seem so fleeting in our world? It is because people do not have biblical hope.

The world's hope is a wishful hope. Christian hope is confident expectant hope. The Christian's hope comes from believing what God has said in His Word is one hundred percent true. Wishful hope is the hope of wishing for something to happen, but lacking any confidence that it will for sure happen. The world's hope is flimsy and readily escapes us when things do not go as we hope they will.

A person may say, "I hope it rains today," or "I hope it does

not rain today.” In either case, we are not absolutely sure it will rain or be a dry day. Although, I must admit we could be a bit surer if we lived in Phoenix, Arizona or in Mobile, Alabama as to whether or not it was going to be a rainy or sunshiny day. The city of Phoenix only receives an average of 9 inches of rainfall a year while the city of Mobile receives an average of 69 inches. The point here concerning hope is that our world commonly uses the word hope in an unsure way. This kind of hope lacks one hundred percent confidence.

It is not that people in general do not have hope at all in this world, but rather their hope lacks one hundred percent certainty. I am sure we have all said things like: “I hope I get this job” or “I hope I will be accepted to the university” or “I hope I can qualify for the loan,” or “I hope I don’t run out of gas” or “I hope I don’t catch the flu.” We have all hoped for things along this line. There is nothing at all sinful about this type of hope, but it is not biblical hope.

Even the world’s view of hope can be helpful at times. When we started high school we likely would not have done so well as freshmen if we did not embrace the wishful hope of one day becoming graduating seniors. Teenagers live with a wishful hope of one day being on their own and leaving their parents’ house. There is nothing wrong with having this kind of hope. In fact, loving parents have a similar hope for their own children. We should value independence. Only let us be cautious in our understanding of healthy independence. We should not allow our spirit of independence to hinder our dependence upon God.

We all need a measure of hope, but there is a sharp contrast between the wishful hope and biblical hope. Unless we move beyond the simple wishful hope to the deeper understanding of the godly hope, we will find ourselves living hopeless lives instead of hope-filled lives. This will be especially true when we meet life's more difficult situations or circumstances. When we experience heartache and tragedy without genuine hope, we will more likely have to deal with doubt, disillusionment, and possibly dangerous discouragement.

When we embrace biblical hope, we discover the strength to productively press on through the tears of life's troubles. Our world does not lack wishful hope, it lacks biblical hope. Biblical hope can refresh our souls and comfort our hearts. This is the kind of hope we need and can live with daily in this hopeless world. The seeds of hope we can discover from Ephesians will help us be able to endure our most pressing problems without losing hope.

Biblical hope ushers into our hearts a total confidence in the goodness of God even in what may seem like a hopeless situation. Biblical hope brings comfort and provides support because our hope has foundation in God's Word. Biblical hope is rooted in faith and is always going to be attached to God's Word. This is the hope we can have as an anchor during the storms we face in this life.

The Christians in the city of Ephesus believed that Jesus not only spoke truth, He was truth. Ephesians 4:21, ²¹ *Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.* When our hearts are troubled and we

are feeling the weight of the world on our backs, we must set our hearts on God's truth. We must begin with the truth of Scripture to come to know true hope. Enduring hope comes from saturating our minds on the wonderful truths we find in the Word. The letter of Ephesians is filled with truth that will keep us from complaining about what happens or does not happen to us in life. We will dig deeper into these truths in our journey of hope.

Jesus and His Word represent an anchor for a believer's hope. *We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure* (Hebrews 6:19a). If we will wrap our arms of faith around God's truth, Satan will never be successful in stealing our hope when we encounter trials. When I mention we live in a hopeless world I am speaking of a world that does not hold to God's definition of hope. Hebrews 11:1, ¹ *Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.* The wording in the King James Version is insightful. The Bible reads, ¹ *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen* (Hebrews 11:1).

Faith has "substance" and that substance links itself to hope. The Bible translations point to the stability of hope that comes by faith. Hope is based on securely holding firmly to the promises of God founded in the Word of God. The New International Version reads; *Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful* (Hebrews 10:23). This shows us the connection between faith and hope. The New American Standard Bible and the King James Version uses the phrase "*hold fast*" in Hebrews 10:23 instead of the phrase "*hold unwaveringly.*"

We can have an unwavering measure of hope in the loneliest, darkest, even the strangest of places when we catch a glimpse of God's good pleasure. Ephesians 1:1-10, ¹ *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: ² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. ⁹ And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.*

Do not read lightly over the word's "pleasure" (v.5) or "good pleasure" (v.9). Both the King James Version and the New King James Version insert the phrase "good pleasure" twice (Ephesians 1:5,9). There is a vital connection between the Bible concept of faith and God's good pleasure. God's blessing us with spiritual blessings lifts our spirits with hope in what otherwise would be an absolutely hopeless situation.

What is the hope we can attain by learning what it is that makes up God's good pleasure? What is God's good

pleasure? It is God's good pleasure to bless His people with every spiritual blessing. Wow! Ephesians 1:3, ³ *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.*

God's good pleasure is to bless, and bless, and bless us some more in the heavenly realms in Christ. Since the letter of Ephesians was written to Christians, we can know God wanted His people to better understand His pleasure and unending desire to bless His people. God has worked and continues to work even now to fill our hearts with hope. There are signs of hopelessness all around us that remind us the devil is also working. The devil works to keep people from having hope.

If we will listen, learn, and apply what God tells us in Ephesians, we will never have to concern ourselves with the devil's robbing us of our hope in Christ. God wants us to have a hope in this life that has weight and value not only for this life, but life in heaven. The Apostle Paul speaks of this type of hope to Christians who have had to say goodbye to their loved ones for the last time on this side of heaven. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, ¹³ *Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.* ¹⁴ *We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.*

The apostle penned these words by way of the Holy Spirit to clear up some confusion about those who have "*fallen asleep.*" The word "*asleep*" is used three times in 1

Thessalonians chapter 4. Each time the word "asleep" is used it references those believers who have died with their belief and hope firmly rooted in Jesus. Does biblical hope make a difference in the way we view death? Absolutely!

No matter where we live, the funeral home business is always busy. As a preaching minister I have conducted my share of memorial services for grieving families. I have directed two separate memorials on the same day more than once for families who have lost loved ones. And once I officiated three memorials on the same day. We can know by our experience and observation the difference everlasting hope can make during times of grief. By observing people at memorial services, we are able to recognize those who believe in God and have some measure of faith.

When a believer faces the reality of the death of a loved one, he will grieve, but not as those who have no hope. When death invades our families, we grieve and it is natural to grieve. We may express our grief differently, but everyone grieves. Believers and unbelievers grieve. Any funeral director will acknowledge that there is a distinct difference between faith-families and non-faith families in the grieving process. Faith families are hope-filled families.

Being receivers of God's good pleasure gives us countless reasons to have hope no matter what happens on this side of heaven. Hope gives us the foundation to grieve differently than those without faith. It is worth repeating this truth. 1 Thessalonians 4:13, ¹³ *Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.*

The term "fall asleep" is a wonderful way to speak of a believer's death. In John chapter 11 Jesus learned that His friend Lazarus from Bethany was sick. Two days later He told His disciples they needed to return to the area of Judea. His closest followers frowned on that idea because some Jews from that area had recently tried to stone Jesus. Bethany was only two miles from Jerusalem where the deep-seated hatred and animosity towards Jesus was most intense. Nonetheless, Jesus told them, ^{11b} *"Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up"* (John 11:11b).

When Jesus arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had already died and had been dead for several days. Martha and Mary were naturally grieving over their brother's death. Jesus lovingly spoke comforting words to these sisters. He shared with Martha some of the most hope-filled words anyone could ever hear at the death of their loved one. John 11:23-25, ²³ *Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."* ²⁴ *Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."* ²⁵ *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies."*

Jesus spoke reassuring and soothing words that had to inject hope into Martha's heart. Jesus was telling Martha in John 11 that His faithful followers will not experience any separation from God. This truth was reinforced later as one of the great blessings of the Christian faith. Romans 8:38-39, ³⁸ *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,* ³⁹ *neither height nor depth, nor anything else in*

all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Jesus did much more for Martha and Mary that day than simply speak words of hope. He went on to raise Lazarus to life after being dead for four days. We can praise God for the reality that darkness, sin, and death does not have the last word. It was God's good pleasure to bless us in the heavenly realms and this incredible truth helps us to live hope-filled lives.

I have noticed most people understand that one day they will die. But I have also noticed while they understand that reality, few people expect it to be the day they die. We all realize there are things that happen in life we cannot see coming until they arrive at our doorstep. These unexpected tragedies can be heart wrenchingly difficult. There are things we cannot envision happening or ever anticipate happening, even down deep we know they could happen.

Hope connected to truth provides believers the ability to have the assurance that what God says in His Word is true. That can be most comforting in times of loss. Since we do not know the exact day we will die or how we will die, we must make our spiritual preparations for death today. For example, I do not know with any certainty I will finish writing this book, or for that matter this first chapter. However, I am not being pessimistic as I sit in this comfortable chair typing away.

I am not being pessimistic when I mention the brevity of life, I am just being realistic. I have conducted funeral

services for families whose loved one died while they were sitting in a chair. We do not know how we will die. And I have no plans to die before completing this book. However, when we take an honest view of life as God designed it, we understand God did not create any of us to live on this earth forever. There will be a day all of us will not complete a book, we will not finish writing, and plans will go unfulfilled. Although, we can take heart in knowing God created us to live forever.

The blessing of our one day living forever with God must begin in our walking with God now prior to falling asleep in Jesus. We have no second chances to go God's way after death. We may not have a two-minute warning when death strikes like we have in football. The last day for some people on earth will be unexpected, so we need to prepare spiritually the best we can for both the expected things in life and the unexpected things. We may not know the day of our death or the way of our death, but we can know as a result of God's good pleasure the blessing of living hope-filled lives. We can never lose when Jesus writes the end of our story.

This is where God's good pleasure and will resurfaces in our reading of Ephesians. We can be confident as a result of God's good pleasure and our faith in God that when we close our eyes in Jesus, we will continue to enjoy our spiritual blessings in Christ. Being in Christ and remaining faithful to the Lord is what gives us confidence that we are prepared to die on any given day.

It is always going to be helpful for us to remember there is only one safe day and one safe place to die and that is in

Christ Jesus. Why? Because God in His good pleasure has blessed us beyond measure in Christ. In Ephesians 1:3-10 we learn it was the pleasure of God to provide numerous blessings. It was the pleasure of God to choose us as His creative masterpiece and adopted us as His sons.

God chose us according to chapter 1:4 and the idea is repeated in verse 11. God chose us. What an amazing statement and we will consider what God choosing us means in some detail. But first let us just think about how we feel when we are chosen for something special. Maybe all these years later we recall the feeling we had when our name was called to be a player on that sports team. Perhaps we can remember being chosen for a part in the school play or being chosen as a representative of our school for some regional or state competition.

We may know the feeling that comes with being chosen to be a player on the all-star team or to compete in a marching band competition. We all remember applying for a certain job we really wanted, and then being chosen for the job. There is nothing like the feeling of being chosen. The feeling of being chosen in such a way does not quickly leave us.

There is another feeling that we all have experienced and it is a much different emotion. We all know the feeling that we get when we are not chosen for the team or the job, and that is what makes being chosen so special. There is an old story that has circulated through the years about a preacher that was chosen to speak for a certain charitable organization. When he was asked to speak, he immediately expressed his delight in having the opportunity.

After the event was over, the program chairman who had asked him to speak handed the preacher a check. The preacher said with some embarrassment, "Oh, I could not possibly accept this check. I just appreciate the honor of being asked to speak. You must have better uses for your money – just apply it to one of those needs." The chairman asked him, "Well would you mind if we put this amount into our special fund?" The preacher replied, "Of course not, but what is the special fund for?" The chairman said, "It is so we can get a better speaker next year." The preacher was chosen, but if the organization had to do over again, they would choose someone else.

God chose us out of His pleasure and God did not make a mistake when He chose us. He did not choose us because we were talented, educated, or a gifted speaker. He chose us out of His good pleasure and that truth is worth repeating over and over. That fact gives us hope. As difficult as it is for us to accept, we are worth the entire world to God. The crucifixion of Jesus proves this point.

Ephesians 1:4, ⁴ *For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.* If God had to do it over again, He would choose us again. That is a hard concept for us to get our arms around because of our shortcomings and sins. What will help us as we continue through Ephesians is to remember we are getting God's view of our value, not our view. We were chosen not because we are good, but because God is good and He values us.

By God's pleasure He chose us and freed us from our sin. He called us to follow His Son and our Savior. He chooses to be

patient with us while He shapes us to His glory. There is a hope that comes from being chosen by God and being adopted as one of His sons. May we take hold of the hope available to us solely based on our Christian identity and being chosen to be a member on God's team. Yes, there is nothing like being chosen and being placed in the body of Christ.

It was the pleasure and will of God which granted us grace and redemption through the blood of Christ. We can find hope in the glory of God's grace (Ephesians 1:6). We can find hope in the riches of God's grace (Ephesians 1:7). God lavishes grace on those "in Christ." As we journey through Ephesians, I will call our attention to the word grace nearly every time it appears because it is closely connected to our living hope-filled lives.

We can learn from what was written that it brings God great pleasure to fill us with our most desperate need – His glorious grace. The Apostle Paul in Romans 15:4 gives inspired confidence of the truth found in the Old Testament Scripture. Romans 15:4, ⁴ *For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.* We can learn from what was written in both the Old and New Testaments that it brought pleasure to God to make our redemption possible.

The New Testament writers occasionally reference Old Testament writings that foreshadow Jesus or His sufferings. For instance, Isaiah 53:4-6, ⁴ *... he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God,*

smitten by him, and afflicted. ⁵ *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.* ⁶ *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

We cannot begin to imagine how difficult it had to be for God the Father to send His beloved Son to this earth to become a sacrifice for our sins. What we can do is read in the Bible how Jesus left the glories of heaven to robe Himself in the flesh so He could become our sacrificial lamb. His coming to seek and save the lost was in complete harmony with God's pleasure. From the beginning God predetermined we could be on God's team.

Ephesians 1:5 ⁵ *having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will* (New King James Version). The word "predestined" here in simplest terms implies God marked out beforehand how that adoption process would take place. We should not get bogged down on that word "predestined" as if we never had a choice in the matter. We do have a choice and if we are Christians, we made the right choice.

Acts 2:21 reads, ²¹ *...everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.* The calling on the Lord God is a choice we make that necessitates our believing, confessing, repenting, and being baptized into Christ. Ananias was sent by God to share a message with Saul. Saul was his Jewish name, but Saul will become more commonly known in Scripture by his Roman name Paul.

In Acts 22 Ananias spoke God's message to Saul. Acts 22 with Acts 22:14-16, ¹⁴ *Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. ¹⁵ You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶ And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'* Verse 16 gives us inspired insight as to what it means to call upon the name of the Lord.

Paul had a choice, as we do, when it came to responding to Jesus. We should remember Ephesians was written to people who had already become Christians. Therefore, we should notice the emphasis the inspired writer Paul (chosen by God to be an apostle) put on a person being "in Christ." Being in Christ is the specific location where we can receive every spiritual blessing. Therefore, being in Christ is an important matter.

We need to be in Christ to have access to the blessings of God's pleasure through Christ. The words "redemption" and "forgiveness" and "grace" have everything to do with who we are in Christ. The term "in Christ" or "in Him" is significant because it is only there that we can obtain the stream of spiritual blessings. People who love God and have godly sorrow over their sins will readily express a willingness to confess Jesus as Lord and call upon the Lord by being baptized into Christ.

Galatians 3:26-27, ²⁶ *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.* Faith in Christ puts us in

touch with all the spiritual blessings available in Christ. When people put on Christ in baptism, they become beneficiaries of spiritual blessings in harmony with God's pleasure and will. Colossians 2:12, ¹² *having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.*

After we call upon the Lord the way Saul did in Acts 22:16, we can enjoy eternal hope. We need eternal hope in the future and we need eternal hope in the present. Christians must remember that when we were in desperate need to find hope in a hopeless world, God made hope available to us. When we were in desperate need for hope it pleased God to make a way we could be released from the condemnation of our sins through the blood of Jesus.

Ephesians 1:7, ⁷ *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.* Is it any wonder that the apostle – knowing the many hope-based truths he would be revealing to God's faithful – would begin the letter of Ephesians with praise for God? Ephesians 1:3, ³ *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.*

Hope that stems from faith produces a confident expectation that those in Christ are recipients of His spiritual blessings. God's breath of hope and the fingerprints of hope can be felt on every word in the Ephesian letter. Hope allows us the strength to live life to the fullest.

CHAPTER 1 – QUESTIONS
TO DISCUSS, DEVELOP, AND DETERMINE

1. Where does Christian hope originate? What must we begin with to come to know true hope?
2. How is Christian hope different from the concept that people generally have concerning hope today? Why does hope seem so fleeting to so many people in the world?
3. Describe the hope we can gain and attain by learning more about what it is that brings pleasure to God. What does the apostle express praise to God for in Ephesians 1:3?
4. What does the term “asleep” or “fall asleep” mean in 1 Thessalonians 4:13? What blessing from God can we hold onto during these lonely times? How does this blessing reinforce our hope?
5. Where according to the Bible does a person need to be in order to be a recipient of every spiritual blessing provided by Christ?
6. What are some specific blessings Christians enjoy as a result of God’s good pleasure in Ephesians 1:1-10?
7. Describe the blessing of being chosen by God and how we can find hope in this Bible truth. Explain how God’s choosing us still leaves us with a choice to make.
8. Where does God always leads His people? (See the Introduction Section)