

Ephesians Part 3 - It's a Mystery



Ephesians 3



Today's Bassline centres around the revelation of a mystery. Paul reveals to the people of Ephesus, and to us, that all are welcome to be part of the work and mission of the Church. During this session the young people will explore Ephesians 3 as Paul sets out the purpose of the Church and then pens a beautiful prayer for its members.

You will need:

- Paper
- Felt-tips, coloured pencils, paint (optional)
- Different translations of Ephesians 3:20-21



Say:

Our Beat activity today is full of mystery. Watch the clip and see if you can solve the mystery together.

Watch:

Can you solve the jail break riddle? - Dan Finkel (3:24) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9uZ-jeZS8dO

Leader's notes:

Watch the clip from 0:00-1:25 and see if the group can find a way to solve the mystery. When they have put forward their ideas, you can reveal the answer by watching the rest of the clip.

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Ask:

Do you enjoy solving mysteries or riddles? If so, why? If not, why not?

Leader's notes:

Here are a few extra riddles for the group to solve.

- 1. What question can you never answer yes to? Are you asleep yet?
- 2. What is always in front of you but can't be seen? The future.
- 3. What is so fragile that saying its name breaks it? Silence.



Leader's notes:

Encourage the group to bring their journals to each session. Spend a few moments recapping what they have discovered about the book of Ephesians so far.

Say:

For our Amplify section today, we are going to turn up the volume of specific words, phrases, and even a punctuation mark! The focus of today's Bassline is Ephesians 3. Paul starts this section of the letter with the following words.

Read:

¹ For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles

- (Ephesians 3:1)

Ask:

- What questions do you have about this opening sentence?
- How could you find out the answers?

Leader's notes:

The group will hopefully spot that the sentence starts with the phrase 'For this reason'. This should immediately prompt the question, 'For **what** reason?' Encourage the group to look at the previous few verses to understand the 'reason' Paul is talking about. Another point to discuss is how Paul describes himself as a 'prisoner **of** (not for) Christ Jesus'.

Ask:

Paul could have written the letter from prison in Rome while Nero was emperor, so what does he mean when he says that he is a prisoner of Christ?



Say:

Paul wanted to make it clear to the reader exactly why he was in prison. It wasn't because he was morally corrupt or because he had broken any law. The followers of Jesus didn't need to be embarrassed that Paul was in prison, as some of them were! Despite the arrest warrant, he was not the captive of any earthly authority. Paul was in prison 'because of his unswerving and sacrificial commitment to fulfil his divine commission to make the gospel known to the Gentiles' (Clinton Arnold). That's why he describes himself as a 'prisoner of Christ'.

Ask:

- What punctuation mark do you notice at the end of verse 1 (in the NIV translation)?
- Why do you think it is there?

Say:

If you are the kind of person who starts a sentence and then goes off on a tangent, then you're in good company. Paul does exactly the same thing here. The phrase, 'For this reason', is actually the start of a prayer, and then Paul sidetracks to talk about something else. The original text didn't have the dash (or ellipsis) that is in many English translations, but Paul did stop midthought and change topic. In the original Greek, what we know as Ephesians 3:2-13 was written as one long thought.

Ask:

Before we read what Paul had to say, look at Ephesians 3:14. What do you notice?

Say:

Paul starts praying, shares something else important, and then picks up the prayer again with the phrase 'For this reason'.

Read:

² Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. ⁴ In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.

- (Ephesians 3:2-5)

Ask:

In our Beat section, we attempted to solve a mystery. What do you think Paul means when he uses the term 'mystery'?

Say:

Kay Arthur describes the biblical meaning of the word 'mystery' as follows:

'A mystery is a spiritual truth that was previously hidden and not revealed until God chose to explain it through one of his servants.'

Kay Arthur



Ask:

What does Paul say about the mystery he is about to reveal?

Read:

- ⁶ This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.
- (Ephesians 3:6)

Ask:

- How would you describe the mystery that Paul has revealed?

Say

The theologian Tom Wright (NT Wright) describes this mystery as follows:

'The secret plan is that God always intended to bring Gentiles, the non-Jewish peoples of the world, into fellowship with himself, on equal terms with his ancient people the Jews. And the good news - the 'gospel'- is that God has now accomplished this through Jesus the Jewish Messiah, Jesus who is also the world's true Lord.'

- Paul for Everyone, Tom Wright

Ask:

- How does the quote from Tom Wright help you to understand the mystery Paul describes in Ephesians 3:6?

Read:

⁷ I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. ⁸ Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. ¹⁰ His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹ according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹² In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. ¹³ I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

- (Ephesians 3:7-13)

Ask:

- Focus on verses 7-10. How does Paul describe the mission God has given to him?
- Think about Paul's backstory. Why do you think he describes himself as 'the least of all the Lord's people'?
- What role does the Church play in making God known to the world?

Say:

The mystery revealed is that all people, both Jew and Gentile, are chosen by God to live out his mission in the world. There is no mention of the 'Church' in the Old Testament, as it is the



'mystery' revealed in the New Testament. In this Church we are all able to approach God with freedom and confidence.

Ask:

What does it feel like to know you can approach God 'with freedom and confidence'?

Say:

Paul starts to pray, then breaks off to check that the Ephesians know the basis on which the Church is built and the mission it is called to fulfil.

Ask:

How would you summarise Paul's message in Ephesians 3:2-13?



Ask:

What is your response to the following quote?

'In this circular to churches in the Ephesus area who didn't know him personally, he (Paul) wants to make sure that they know where he fits into the millennia-old purpose of the one true God. He may be in jail (verse 1), but his vision is as free as the wind and as wide as the horizon. And he wants everyone who reads this letter - then and now! - to share the vision and to join in the work.'

- Paul for Everyone, Tom Wright



Say:

For the Sound Check section, we are going to focus on the prayer Paul wrote on behalf of the church communities he was writing to.

Read:

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

- (Ephesians 3:14-19)



Leader's notes:

Today's Sound Check gives the group the opportunity to get creative. Provide paper, felt-tips, coloured pencils, paints (if you're feeling ambitious) and ask the group to create a pictorial representation of these verses. This doesn't have to be a beautiful watercolour, so it doesn't matter if they are not artistic. It could be an equation, a mind map or even a scientific diagram! As long as it represents the message of these words, then they can be as creative as they like. The hope is that by presenting the message in an unusual way, they will take more time to process and retain Paul's powerful prayer.



Leader's notes:

If the group wants to discover more about Ephesians 3:14-21, then watch and discuss the clip together. The clip encourages the group to write their own doxology. Encourage the young people to have a go at this as part of their personal devotions before you meet again.

Watch:

Praise God for All Things - Ephesians 3:14-21 - Our Daily Bread Video Devotional (2:07) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLE6zSKzeck



Ask:

In Ephesians 3:14 we read, 'For this reason I kneel before the Father.' In other translations, it mentions bowing before the Father. Does it make a difference what posture we take when we pray? If so, how?

Say:

There is no set way to pray, but it's interesting that Paul specifies how he prays for the young churches. By bowing his knee before the Father, Paul's total focus is on prayer.

Leader's notes:

For the Selah section today, the group are going to share in prayer together using the words of Ephesians 3:20–21. A handout is provided with different translations of the text. Cut up the handout and share them among the group. If they are able, ask the young people to kneel in prayer. Spend time reading the different translations and pray on behalf of the whole group and your own church.





Say:

In a piece of music, the coda brings the different aspects of the melody, harmonies and bassline to a conclusion. It pulls together the different themes and often, but not always, brings resolution to a piece of music.

Ask:

As you reflect on everything you have learned today, what is your coda?

What is the one thing you will take away from the third chapter of Ephesians?

Leader's notes:

Give the young people a moment to think about your question and briefly share their coda with the group before the session comes to an end.







Different Translations of Ephesians 3:20-21

²⁰ Now to Him who is able to [carry out His purpose and] do superabundantly more than all that we dare ask or think [infinitely beyond our greatest prayers, hopes, or dreams], according to His power that is at work within us, ²¹ to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations for ever and ever. Amen.

(Ephesians 3:20-21 AMP)

²⁰ Now to the God who can do so many awe-inspiring things, immeasurable things, things greater than we ever could ask or imagine through the power at work in us, ²¹ to Him be all glory in the church and in Jesus the Anointed from this generation to the next, for ever and ever. Amen.

(Ephesians 3:20-21 Voice)

²⁰⁻²¹ God can do anything, you know - far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us.

Glory to God in the church!
Glory to God in the Messiah, in Jesus!
Glory down all the generations!
Glory through all millennia! Oh, yes!

- (Ephesians 3:20-21 MSG)

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

- (Ephesians 3:20-21 NIV)

²⁰ Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.
²¹ Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations for ever and ever! Amen.

- (Ephesians 3:20-21 *NLT*)

²⁰ To him who by means of his power working in us is able to do so much more than we can ever ask for, or even think of: ²¹ to God be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus for all time, for ever and ever! Amen.

(Ephesians 3:20-21 GNT)

²⁰⁻²¹I pray that Christ Jesus and the church will forever bring praise to God. His power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. Amen.

(Ephesians 3:20-21 CEV)